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or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

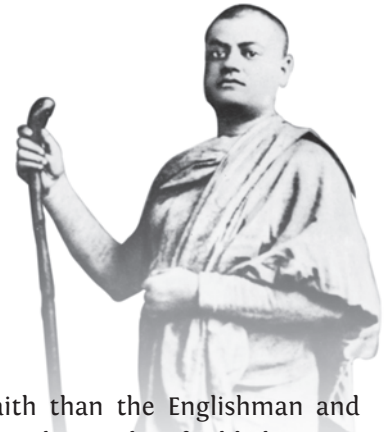


December 2010
Child Development

Vol. 115, No. 12

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *CHILD DEVELOPMENT*



THE only ism that we require now is this wonderful idea of the soul—its eternal might, its eternal strength, its eternal purity, and its eternal perfection. If I had a child I would from its very birth begin to tell it, “Thou art the Pure One.” You have read in one of the Puranas that beautiful story of queen Madalasa, how as soon as she has a child she puts her baby with her own hands in the cradle, and how as the cradle rocks to and fro, she begins to sing, “Thou art the Pure One, the Stainless, the Sinless, the Mighty One, the Great One.” Ay, there is much in that. Feel that you are great and you become great. What did I get as my experience all over the world, is the question. They may talk about sinners—and if all Englishmen really believed that they were sinners, Englishmen would be no better than the negroes in Central Africa. God bless them that they do not believe it! On the other hand, the Englishman believes he is born the lord of the world. He believes he is great and can do anything in the world; if he wants to go to the sun or the moon, he believes he can; and that makes him great. If he had believed his priests that he was a poor miserable sinner, going to be barbecued through all eternity, he would not be the same Englishman that he is today. So I find in every nation that, in spite of priests and superstition, the divine within lives and asserts itself. We have lost faith. Would you believe me,

we have less faith than the Englishman and woman—a thousand times less faith! These are plain words; but I say these, I cannot help it. ... How many of you could do that? And why cannot you do that? Do you not know it? You know more than they do; you are more wise than is good for you, that is your difficulty! Simply because your blood is only like water, your brain is sloughing, your body is weak! You must change the body. Physical weakness is the cause and nothing else. You have talked of reforms, of ideals, and all these things for the past hundred years; but when it comes to practice, you are not to be found anywhere—till you have disgusted the whole world, and the very name of reform is a thing of ridicule! And what is the cause? Do you not know? You know too well. The only cause is that you are weak, weak, weak; your body is weak, your mind is weak, you have no faith in yourselves! ... Let me tell you, strength, strength is what we want. And the first step in getting strength is to uphold the Upanishads, and believe—“I am the Soul”, “Me the sword cannot cut; nor weapons pierce; me the fire cannot burn; me the air cannot dry; I am the Omnipotent, I am the Omniscient.”

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
3.242.



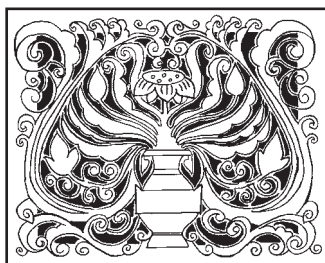
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Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
E-mail: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

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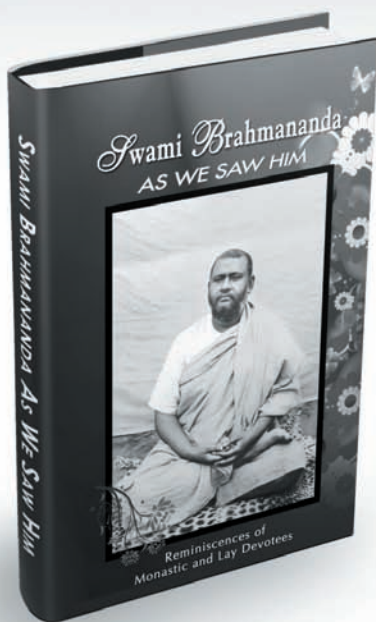
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Swami Brahmananda As We Saw Him



Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who regarded him as his spiritual son. Also known as Raja Maharaj or simply 'Maharaj', Swami Brahmananda was the first President of the Ramakrishna Order. A man of deep meditative temperament and down-to-earth wisdom and humour, Maharaj quietly carried the mantle of guiding the fledgling Ramakrishna Order in its first 21 years and also provided spiritual guidance to numerous spiritual aspirants, monastic and lay, who came in touch with him. This book is a compilation of their reminis-

cences and personal accounts culled from various sources.

The book has six appendices, glossary, introductory notes about the contributors and is illustrated with around 100 photographs.

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

The Child

December 2010
Vol. 115, No. 12

त्वं स्त्री त्वं पुमानसि त्वं कुमार उत वा कुमारी ।
त्वं जीर्णो दण्डेन वञ्चसि त्वं जातो भवसि विश्वतोमुखः ॥

You are the woman, You are the man, You are the boy, (and) You are the girl too. You are the old man tottering with a stick. Taking birth, You have your faces everywhere.

(*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.3)

अथ यदा सुषुप्तो भवति यदा न कस्यचन वेद हिता नाम
नाड्यो द्वासप्ततिः सहस्राणि हृदयात्पुरीततमभिप्रतिष्ठन्ते
ताभिः प्रत्यवसृष्य पुरीतति शेते स यथा कुमारो वा महाराजो
वा महाब्राह्मणो वातिष्ठीमानन्दस्य गत्वा शयीत एवमेवैष एतच्छेते ॥

Again when it (the Being full of Consciousness) becomes fast asleep, when it does not know anything, it comes back along the seventy-two thousand nerves called *hita*, which extend from the heart to the pericardium (the whole body), and remains in the body. As a baby, or an emperor, or a noble brahmana lives, having attained the acme of bliss, so does it remain.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.19)

बाल्ये दुःखातिरेको मललुलितवपुः स्तन्यपाने पिपासा
नो शक्तश्चेन्द्रियेभ्यो भवगुणजनिताः शत्रवो मां तुदन्ति ।
नानारोगोत्थदुःखाद् रुदनपरवशः शङ्करं न स्मरामि
क्षन्तव्यो मेऽपराधः शिव शिव शिव भोः श्रीमहादेव शम्भो ॥

In my childhood my suffering never came to an end, my body was covered with filth and I craved for my mother's breasts; over my body and limbs I had no control, I was pursued by troublesome flies and mosquitoes; day and night I cried with the pain of many an ailment, forgetting thee, O Shankara. Therefore, O Shiva! O Mahadeva! O Shambu! Forgive me, I pray for my transgressions.

(*Shivaparadhakshamapana Stotra*, 2)

THIS MONTH

In revealing the **Hidden Future Humanity** the responsibility of each citizen to provide childcare is crucial. Its negligence is a big blunder. To wake up to this reality we need to uproot the evil of child abuse in all its forms and understand the metaphysics of life.

In **Children of Immortal Bliss** Swami Madhurananda, a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, scratches the veneer of India's economic development to expose its misplaced priorities and the need to redress the plight of half of its child population living in abject indigence.



Tribal development in India is fraught with dangers and many vested interests. How dedication to an ideal overcomes obstacles and transforms lives in Abujhmarh, one of the neglected tribal areas of India, is narrated by Dr Dipak Sengupta in **Abujhmarh: A Quiet Transformation**. The author is former Chief General Manager, Coal India Limited.

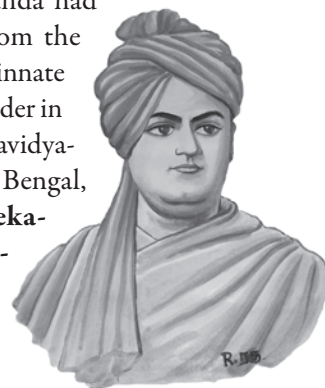


The Constitution of India protects children from discrimination, gives them free and compulsory education, stops them from being employed in hazardous work, and empowers their fundamental rights. Prof. D P Chaudhri, Visiting Senior Honorary Fellow, Department of Management, Monash University, Australia, shows in **Child's Rights and**

Elementary Education in India why and how the state has failed to implement these laws while endangering its future.



Long before the world became aware of the need to organize and protect universal human rights and dignity, Swami Vivekananda had voiced these thoughts from the standpoint of humanity's innate divinity. Benulal Dhar, Reader in Philosophy, Sukanta Mahavidyalaya, University of North Bengal, describes in **Swami Vivekananda and Human Dignity** what made Swamiji rectify the utter dehumanization he saw by the doctrine of Vedanta.



Swami Prabhavananda, founder Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, concludes **Mysticism and Mystic Visions** with the definite tests and signs that characterize a mystic and help one from being misled.

Very few people can clearly tell what constitutes a personality, while many cannot articulate it correctly. Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, in the tenth instalment of **Vedanta-sara** shows what true personality is according to Vedanta.

Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, gives a vivid picture of Sri Ramakrishna during his terminal illness in **Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna**.

Hidden Future Humanity

THREE MIGHTY LIFE PROCESSES have helped humankind become social and civilized. They are: the miracle of birth, child rearing, and infancy. Though these processes are inherent in all living beings, mammals have a higher degree of evolvement that makes them relate differently to life. And among mammals humans have developed to deal with these three processes not only instinctively but consciously. Humans are thus products of nature, nurture, and even more. Swami Vivekananda says, 'the ideal woman is the mother ... and God is called Mother.'

It takes almost a year for a baby to walk with tottering steps. Before those first steps it is totally dependent on maternal care longer than any other species. For survival this is a disadvantage. But evolution has designed humans to be so dependent as infants because the formation of their brains and bodies demands longer time and care. Nine months in the mother's matrix is not enough to complete this growth. On the other hand, if a baby stays longer in the womb the lives of both mother and child are endangered.

Provided it is supplied with nutritious food, a baby almost triples in weight during its first year of life, and the volume of the brain grows astonishingly as it forges neural connections. A newborn inherits simple reflexes—sucking, grasping, yawning, and the like—proving that the nervous system is functional. The growing baby however cannot maintain equable body temperature and needs to be kept warm. It sleeps, wails, feeds, and dirties itself, but inside a very complex universe is being created. Locomotor and perceptual development follows.

In the next stage children are, according to old psychological studies, egocentric, amoral, irrational, and their world is a mixture of dream and fantasy.

However, this opinion has, at least among some scientists, changed in the last few decades. The child is actually a little adult and learns the same way as adults do. It has much greater cognitive abilities than was thought about, and as it grows a little, the child has an intuitive grasp of certain abstract concepts. On the other hand, innumerable child prodigies in various cultures have defied child psychology and development specialists.

Looking into the eyes of a baby one can see the profound depths of life, of innocence, and of nature at its pristine best. One can then understand why humanity orients itself towards this new creation, this vulnerable miracle of nature. Though humankind participates in the process of life—for only life creates life—yet human knowledge has been unable to sound life's unfathomable depths. It has baffled thinkers of all types for ages. At the background of every human quest is the quest to understand life. Solve this mystery and the mystery of the universe stands solved.

The child is the focal point of the family, and at every stage the family has to undergo plenty of sacrifices, with mothers taking the brunt. A society that orients itself towards childcare and education obviously becomes self-sacrificing, altruistic, and humane. Thus, a society's level of culture and evolution is marked by how much time and resources it invests in looking after its children—its future.

Almost everyone knows what the dangers of civilization are today: terrorism, fanaticism, proxy, and low-intensity wars. There is still a major threat: the physical and mental malformation of children; it is called child abuse. This threat, this evil, cuts at the very roots of social and individual sanity. It stunts lives of innumerable children, and the scars of abuse keep haunting them all their lives. As a child

is one of the marvels and mysteries of nature, there is this other mystery: Why do some people abuse and destroy life? What kind of inhuman heartlessness drives some people, even a parent, to hurt the future of humanity in its seed form?

One form of abuse that has only recently been fully recognized, though we were living with it since long, is prenatal influences on the unborn. The child's learning process starts well in the mother's womb, by the sixth month of the formation of the foetus. Prenatal abuse is twofold. The first comprises irregular consumption of prescribed and non-prescribed drugs, alcohol, junk food, and other substances that affect the foetus formation and the mother's health. Swamiji says, 'How many people of good, healthy lives were born of weak parents, were born of sickly, blood-poisoned parents?' The other involves the harm done to the foetus through the mother's negative emotions, which can be created by herself or others. The baby should not be injected with frustration, boredom, humiliation, stress, and anxiety. Ignorance of all these forms of child abuse is as detrimental to a society as the abuse perpetrated. Therefore, if the common belief that child abusers themselves were abused children is true, this vicious circle needs to be broken by a substantial amount of awareness and by shaking society out of its inertia, its indolence.

Indian mythology is interspersed with stories of sages like Ashtavakra and others who learnt things while in their mother's womb. Swamiji says: 'The child must be prayed for. Those children that come with curses, that slip into the world, just in a moment of inadvertence, because that could not be prevented—what can we expect of such progeny?' He adds: 'Go to a hundred thousand colleges, read a million books, associate with all the learned men of the world—better off you are when born with the right stamp. You are born for good or evil. The child is a born god or a born demon; that is what the books say. Education and all these things come afterwards—are a mere bagatelle.'

The ancient sages of India searched the fundamentals of life and came up with startling discov-

eries that unravel the profound mystery veiling life. They found *prana*, life or vital force, which is 'dear', permeating everything and having a series of layers from the grossest to the highest. When meditated upon *prana* leads one to the highest Reality: '*Prano vai ... paramam brahma*; the vital force is verily ... the Supreme Brahman.' The sages inculcated the knowledge of this universal life encapsulating everything among the common people through simple stories.

Moreover, one who realizes this *prana* as Brahman becomes a *paramahansa* whose external behaviour is like a child's: natural, trusting, unattached, without pretensions and ego. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'attaining the state of the paramahansa one becomes like a child.' Ordinarily, when a grown-up behaves like a child it could be either psychological regression or the mind's defence mechanism in order to eliminate anxiety and stress. The extremes look alike, though they are different poles of existence. The Puranas, with their mythological stories, also teach that the first created were the four mind-born sons of Brahma, the Creator. They are depicted as eternal boys endowed with the knowledge of the highest Reality. They were the first *paramahansas*. Sri Ramakrishna explains that, 'the paramahansa is like a five-year-old child. He sees everything filled with Consciousness.'

That all-pervading Consciousness was addressed by Sri Ramakrishna as the Divine Mother of the Universe. Many believe that in this era she has embodied as the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. But beyond beliefs, one fact is undeniable: before Sri Sarada Devi everybody, young or old, man or woman, spontaneously felt like a child. She looked upon all humans and non-humans as her children. 'Her infinite motherhood left none outside its all-comprehensive grasp. Brahmachari Rashbihari asked her one day, "Are you the Mother of all?" "Yes," replied the Mother. "Even of these lower creatures?" pressed the inquirer. "Yes," answered the Mother.' This was her natural state of heart: 'I can't contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother.'



Children of Immortal Bliss

Swami Madhurananda

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S social and spiritual message for India is more relevant today than it was a hundred years ago. There are several facts that support this statement. The main one is that, in spite of the political and institutional freedom India is experiencing for more than sixty years as well as the material knowledge and means India has at hand now, which were unimaginable at the end of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of Indians are still far from attaining the dignified life Swamiji strove for. This becomes more prominent when one compares India's sluggish social development with that of several nations that were in the same or worse condition than India a hundred years back. Therefore, to sensitize ourselves to this reality and to find a possible solution through the best that India has—its religious sentiment and ancient wisdom—the present article takes as a sample the situation of the most vulnerable section of Indian society, the section whose quality and prosperity will determine the real future of India.

Telling Facts

One out of every four children in the world who die under the age of one is an Indian. According to the latest (2008) UNICEF records, in India the infant (under 1) mortality rate is 52 per thousand, and the child (under 5) mortality rate is 69 per thousand.¹ Translated into numbers this means that every year about 14 lakh Indian children cannot see their first birthday and 18.3 lakh cannot see their fifth.

According to the 2009 global hunger index, India ranks 65th out of 84 developing countries and countries in transition. Despite years of robust economic growth India scored worse than nearly 25 Sub-Saharan African countries and all of South Asia, except Bangladesh.² Around 46%

of all children under the age of three are too small for their age, 47% are underweight, and at least 16% show signs of wasting. Anaemia affects 74% of Indian children under the age of three and more than 90% of adolescent girls. Diarrhoea, which is often easily treatable, remains the second major cause of death among children after respiratory-tract infections.³

As while browsing statistics there is a tendency to read just figures, without weighing their real import, the above statements can be read in these words: almost half of Indian children below the age of three are malnourished, and two-thirds of them along with *almost all* adolescent girls suffer from anaemia!

There is another immense and silent perpetrator impeding India's future prosperity, more difficult to deal with, and of which only recently a rigorous survey has been conducted. India continues to face widespread suffering from child labour and child abuse in multiple forms.

In April 2007 the government of India published the *National Study on Child Abuse* through the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This effort represents the first large-scale Indian study on this matter. The conclusions of the report show that 50% of Indian children are subjected to some form of physical abuse, and most children do not report the matter to anyone. Out of those abused in family situations, 88% are physically abused by parents. Regarding sexual abuse, the study exposes that 53% of Indian children suffer from one or more forms of sexual abuse. 21% of child respondents faced severe forms of sexual abuse, and 50% faced other forms. 50% of the abuse is perpetrated by persons known to the child or persons in a position of trust and responsibility.

Children on the street, at work, and in institutional care reported the highest rates of sexual assault. Irrespective of the context, most children do not report the matter to anyone.

The study also interviewed 2,324 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Almost half reported being physically or sexually abused as children. The study further states that 50% of children reported facing emotional abuse—equal percentages for both girls and boys. In 83% of the cases parents were the abusers. 48% of girls surveyed actually wished they were boys.

Why would nearly half of Indian girls like to be boys? If one considers how girls are regarded before being born, one can guess how they are treated after birth. According to UNICEF, 'in 1901 there were 3.2 million [32 lakh] fewer women than men in India—a hundred years later the deficit increased over 10 times to 35 million [3.5 crore] at the time of Census 2001. The most disturbing decline is seen in the age group 0–6 years. The sex ratio (number of girls for every 1,000 boys) within this age group plunged from 1,010 in 1941 to 927 in 2001.'⁴

'According to the report published in 2005 on "Trafficking in Women and Children in India", 44,476 children were reported missing in India, out of which 11,008 children continued to remain untraced. India, being a major source and destination country for trafficked children from within India and adjoining countries has, by conservative estimates, three to five lakh girl children in commercial sex and organized prostitution.'⁵

And all this is happening here in Mother India, the land that worships God as mother like no other land; the race with historical role models of womanhood like Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, and Queen Madalasa; the nation that a little over a hundred and fifty years ago gave birth to Sri Sarada Devi. Any manual for dealing with child abuse victims states that the main psychological consequences of the victims are guilt, shame, fear, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, self-disgust, and feeling degraded.⁶ How can a person have a normal life and be productive to society if his or her self-confidence has been crippled at a young age? How can such souls achieve a steady spiritual life?

Confronting Realities

UNICEF's reports praise India's progress since attaining independence, but observe that the high economic growth rates of the recent past have not been matched in the social sector. This issue is made more urgent as investment in the social sector allows for acceleration and sustainment of economic growth.

India jumped from being the twelfth largest world economy in 1995 to the fourth largest in 2007.⁷ Per capita income increased from 7,321 rupees in 1990 to 19,500 rupees in 2005.⁸ Hence, GDP growth and per capita income in India have increased by about 250% from 1990 to 2005. During the same period infant mortality decreased only by 25%, and child mortality decreased only by 39%.⁹ Moreover, 'with an estimated 12.6 million [1.26 crore] children engaged in hazardous occupations, India has the largest number of child labourers under the age of 14 in the world.'¹⁰

Let us briefly deal with the myth of overpopulation. China, another Asian economic powerhouse, has a population larger than India, but has sharply reduced child malnutrition to just 7% of its children under five. The corresponding figure in India is 46%—six times more!¹¹ Infant and child mortality in China are 18 and 21 per thousand respectively,¹² while the corresponding figures in India are 52 and 69 per thousand. Given these figures one



PHOTO: DAMON LYNCH

might feel that Chinese people love their children more than Indians love theirs.

Another revealing comparison: From 2001 to 2008 India has been the second largest country in the world, by volume of money, to sign agreements to acquire weaponry from other countries—for a total of 30.8 billion dollars [1.38 lakh crore rupees].¹³ In 2009 India was the largest world importer of arms,¹⁴ and the annual Indian budget for acquiring weaponry has yet increased during 2010. The reason to justify this increase has been the unfortunate attacks in Mumbai during November 2008. In fact, India has experienced much terrorist activity over the last two years, which has highly upset the media and thousands of Indians. Terrorism does need to be checked, but at what price? From 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2009 there have been 5,783 victims of terrorist attacks in India—1,623 deaths, 2,939 wounded, and 1,221 hostages.¹⁵ During half of that period—in 2008 only—about 1,830,000 [18.3 lakh] Indian children under five died mainly of preventable causes, about 400,000 [4 lakh] of those could not live more than twenty-four hours, and more than 60,000,000 [6 crore] Indian children under five suffered from underweight—one third of those from *severe* underweight.¹⁶ We should probably better define where lies the true cause of ‘terror’ in India.

According to UNESCO, in India the youth—aged 15–24—literacy rate increased from 61% in 1991 to 82% in 2007. This news looks good. Still, if we watch a bit closely, we can ask what kind of education is being given. Adult—aged 15 and above—education has increased in India from 57% in 2000 to 61% in 2005, and UNESCO estimated 66% for 2007. During the same period crimes perpetuated against children in India have increased by 27%—from 10,814 registered cases in 2001 to 14,975 in 2005. In 2007 the number of registered cases against children has been 20,410, an increase of 36% in only two years.¹⁷ And these are only ‘registered’ cases!

The Tip of the Iceberg

All state categorization has been intentionally re-



moved from the statistics presented in this article for three major reasons. Firstly, these are national problems to be considered in a pan-Indian context. Although implementation of central policies and expenditures of central government allocations depend purely on each state’s procedures, all these problems taken together evince some common tendencies in the whole of India and not in particular states. Secondly, presenting data statewise gives the impression that those states that come lower on some lists have no problems, which is not the case. Thirdly, almost all states are on the top of one or other list. While child and infant mortality and malnutrition are more prominent in economically poor states, female feticide and youth suicide are higher in richer or more literate states. Abuse against children has no particular socioeconomic pattern, it occurs across the states of India.

In addition to these formal statistics and comparisons, with their different methodologies and scopes, another type of research can provide results more limited in scale but more accurate in quality. Each one of us—in our neighbourhood, workplace, or on travels in India—can see, sense, and experience these harsh realities over and over. Many who have done this kind of personal research confirm that formal statistics are the survey of what surfaces—they represent just the tip of the iceberg. As described above, the sad condition of crores of Indian children does not seem to be only a consequence of poverty, overpopulation, or lack of education. Neither is it an exclusive problem of the government, whichever the ruling party or whatever

the level of corruption—after all, the government is formed by Indians who were once common citizens. Moreover, blaming the government always is just a way of avoiding personal responsibility in the matter. Then, where is the root of the problems half of the Indian child population is suffering?

This is something we all have to discuss together; a unilateral opinion is always limited. And of the many issues that can be discussed we would like to introduce the following: It seems that after the advent of Swami Vivekananda, reinforced by the independence of India, some self-confidence at individual level was regained in certain sectors of society, particularly those that did not suffer the maladies described above. However, the awakening of a collective-confidence that says ‘we together’ can bring a change is yet to be achieved. When self-confidence has the touch of solidarity—that empathy with and assistance to those outside one’s family or limited circle—the collective-confidence that transform societies is produced.

Self-confidence plus Solidarity

Zilda Arns, paediatrician, Brazilian, mother of five, and a widow. Shortly after the loss of her husband in 1983, she started the Pastoral da Crianças. This pastoral childcare programme has one of the greatest success rates worldwide in reducing infant mortality rates. It currently (2010) has over 261,000 volunteers in Brazil itself—the majority of them are women. They take care of more than 18 lakh children from birth to six years of age as well as 95,000

pregnant women in more than 4,000 municipalities and 42,000 communities. In an interview Ms Zilda explained that the programme teaches families ‘very simple things—they are generally people with very little education—but indispensable for the children’s health: nutrition of pregnant mothers, breast feeding, oral hydration, vaccinations.’ ‘Moreover,’ she adds, ‘every year we teach 32,000 adults, almost always mothers, to read and write.’ Due to the programme’s success, representatives from other countries have visited Brazil to learn how to develop similar models for their homelands. The Pastoral da Criança network now includes twenty countries that have implemented their methods in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

The programme structured by Ms Zilda’s institution has three basic pillars. One pillar consists of what they teach mothers to prepare. They provide instructions for home-made rehydration solutions from two soup spoons of sugar and one of salt in one litre of water. They also provide directions for a multi-mixture made from different flours—rice, corn, wheat, bran—green leaves, pumpkin seeds, powdered egg shells, and other ingredients.¹⁸ This supplement is then added to the local food supply. The concept is that the nutritional value of the food is enhanced by the variety. For decades this mixture has proved to be as nutritious as it is cheap and easy to prepare.

The second pillar is the logistics, which is as simple as the basic mixture described. All the workers are volunteers—about 90% are women—trained to teach poor mothers to adopt these methods. The rehydration solution, the multi-mixture, and other simple measures help reduce deaths from malnutrition, diarrhoea, dehydration, contamination, and other diseases. The process only requires basic instruction and very little money. Repeated visits and directions gradually create closer relations between the volunteers and the families. This cooperative approach opens the doors for the last and most important pillar.

The third pillar consists of follow-up programmes for pregnant mothers and children below



PHOTO: DAMON LYNCH



Ms Zilda Arns (left) in Haiti, a few hours before the earthquake of 12 January 2010

six, and of what they call ‘promotion of the person’s dignity, citizenship, spirituality, and education for peace’. This follow-up not only provides sustainability for the whole programme, it also helps inculcate values to significantly decrease child abuse.

The first pillar may not be too difficult to implement; it is a question of gathering the ingredients that are locally accessible and imparting proper instructions. The third pillar can work well once the system gains momentum. The whole challenge is to build up a body of volunteers facilitated by the identification and recruitment of local leaders. This is the initial push of the whole programme, and at this level material support does not help much—rather, it is the action of the heart that works. It is at this level that Ms Zilda made a difference. She rang a bell in other mothers’ hearts, like birds do when they sense danger in a forest;

then the alertness kept on running far and wide. It appears that for Ms Zilda her five children were not enough; she wanted to make all the children of the world her own.

The Pastoral da Criança website, in the section that presents its achievements, says: ‘But, there is still a lot to be done! Nowadays, the Pastoral da Criança follows approximately 20% of the poor Brazilian children. The goal to be reached is 100% of those children.’ This ambitious expression implies that they do not expect anything from Brazilian government agencies or anyone else. They are ready to do the whole work by themselves! This sentiment reminds of what Swami Vivekananda said to a ‘group’ of people: ‘Work as if on each of you depended the whole work.’¹⁹

In 2006 Ms Zilda was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and in 2008 she handed over the day-to-

day control of her institution at the age of seventy-three. Nonetheless, she continued to travel widely, lecturing on her experiences in childcare and aid work. On 12 January 2010 she gave a lecture to a hundred and twenty Christian Catholic priests. After the lecture was over a few of them approached her to ask questions while the rest left the hall. It was 4.53 pm, and the place of the lecture was Port au Prince, Haiti. The devastating earthquake occurred, and along with fifteen priests still in the hall and over two hundred thousand people Ms Zilda left her body. But she never left her children, her work is going on.²⁰

Religious Involvement

There has been a large religious institution backing Ms Zilda's programme from the very beginning. Beyond the influence that religion exerts at the time of recruiting and motivating people, it is one of the best channels to inculcate family and social values required to solve problems like child abuse. Working through religion is particularly relevant in India. Swami Vivekananda was straightforward in this respect: 'The life of this nation is religion, its language religion, and its idea religion; and your politics, society, municipality, plague-prevention work, and famine-relief work—all these things will be done as they have been done all along here, viz. only through religion.'²¹

By quoting the example of Pastoral da Criança there is no intention of diminishing the very commendable work done for Indian children by several non-profit organizations, national and international. On the contrary, their activities are to be praised.²² Not only institutions, there are also many dedicated persons who are devoting their lives to change the situation of children in India.²³ However, the majority of those institutions, including thousands of anganwadis—government sponsored childcare and mother-care centres—work primarily through paid workers and in a secular way. But again, the response to religion in India is so great that one more step of imparting values would have a transforming effect. The scope of Vedanta in this field is vast and Swamiji's appeal

direct: 'I only ask you to work to realise more and more the Vedantic ideal of the solidarity of man and his inborn divine nature.'²⁴ This Vedantic ideal calls to empathize with almost half of India's malnourished child population and more than half abused. Otherwise, will Indian children grow with the physical capacity and the psychological balance to believe and realize that they are *amritasya putrah*, children of immortal bliss?

The intention of describing Ms Zilda Arns's initiative here was to provide an example of a very successful *integral* programme that tackles almost all the problems Indian children are suffering at present and that is guided by religious principles. The programme has helped drastically reduce, in only a few years, the high rate of child mortality of a country that shares a number of characteristics with India: both are tropical, developing countries with growing economies and widening gap between the rich and the poor; both have suffered from rampant, widespread child abuse; and although Brazil has one-fifth the population of India, it is one and a half the size of India, which presents a big challenge at the time of reaching remote and inaccessible areas.

Through Ms Zilda's work we also wanted to show that if a widow with five children could do so much, anyone who understands can also help nourish and protect the innocence and purity of humankind.

PB



PHOTO: 'THE CUTEST THING', LUIS ARGERICH / FLICKR

Notes and References

1. UNICEF's detailed statistics on Indian children are available at <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_statistics.html> accessed 31 August 2010. According to the *Indian Economic Survey 2009–10* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2010), Appendix 123, issued by the government of India, the infant mortality in 2008 was 53 per thousand.
2. *2009 Global Hunger Index* (Bonn: Deutsche Welthungerhilfe; Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute; Dublin: Concern Worldwide, 2009), 13.
3. UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_background.html> accessed 31 August 2010.
4. UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1360.htm> accessed 31 August 2010.
5. S Sen and P M Nair, *Trafficking in Women and Children in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005); quoted in *Study on Child Abuse, India 2007* (New Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India), vi.
6. *Dealing with Child Victims* (New Delhi: UNICEF and Ministry of Human Resource, 2005), 11; *Counseling Service for Child Survivors of Trafficking* (New Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2006), 58, 137.
7. In Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
8. See *Human Development Report, 2002* and *Human Development Report, 2007–08* (New York: United Nations Development Program).
9. According to UNICEF, infant mortality rate in India was 83 and 58 per thousand in 1990 and 2005. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of India, the figures are 80 and 58 per thousand in 1990 and 2005.
10. UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_background.html> accessed 24 September 2010.
11. See *Human Development Report 2009* (New York: United Nations Development Program).
12. UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china_statistics.html> accessed 31 August 2010.
13. See Richard F Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 46.
14. See database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (www.sipri.org).
15. Detailed statistics of each single terrorist attack in the world is freely offered by the US National Counterterrorism Centre (www.nctc.gov), from where these statistics have been taken.
16. UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_statistics.html> accessed 31 August 2010.
17. More than half of the cases registered are rape, kidnapping, and abduction—National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, government of India, <<http://ncrb.nic.in/>> accessed 31 August 2010.
18. Note that pumpkin seeds and egg shells are generally thrown away by Indian families.
19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.370.
20. The information for this section was obtained from 'Viveu Como Santa, Morreu Como Mártir' [Lived as a Saint, Died as a Martyr], *Veja*, 20 January 2010, 84–7; and the official website of Pastoral da Criança <<http://pci.org.br/>> accessed 31 August 2010.
21. *Complete Works*, 5.461.
22. See a list of several private organizations working for the sake of Indian children, issued by the government of India: *Directory of Voluntary Organizations: Social Defence and Prevention of Trafficking* (New Delhi: National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, 2009), freely available at <<http://nipccd.nic.in/dir/vsd.doc>> accessed 31 August 2010.
23. Much of the literature from where the governmental statistics presented in this article were extracted has been provided by a cardiologist who left a lucrative position abroad to work for Indian children in different anganwadis.
24. *Complete Works*, 3.196.

Without heart, everything else counts for nought. Unless the heart expands, nothing else will avail. Merely to continue sitting with the eyes shut will produce no fruit, it will not bring about God-realization. One's heart must feel for others; one must identify oneself with the happiness and sorrows of others; then only will God be realized.

—Swami Akhandananda

The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, 345

Abujmarh: A Quiet Transformation

Dr Dipak Sengupta



THE TERM *ABUJMARH* is generally translated as 'unknown highland'. But this rendering does not convey the sentiment associated with the name of the verdant land of Abujmarh, a part of the state of Chhattisgarh. *Abujh* has a concealed meaning: innocence; and 'innocence' spontaneously brings to mind an associated word: exploitation. Abujmarh is a rugged hilly terrain home to a group of tribal people largely innocent of the ways of modern society and therefore open to exploitation. Abujmarias have been exploited by traders from other places who would take tendu leaves and chiraunji seeds from them in exchange for the much cheaper salt and trinkets, by corrupt government officials and policemen who would snatch jungle goods in the name of law, and by extreme leftists who made the jungles their permanent residence in the name of providing protection.

Abujmarh lies largely in Narainpur district, which has its headquarters in Narainpur town—about 280 km south of Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh. Narainpur is nearly 50 km from Kondagaon on National Highway 43 connecting Raipur to Jagdalpur. Spanning an area of about 4,000 sq. km, the Abujmarh hill tract is inhabited mainly by the Hill Maria tribe, with some settlements of the Dorla tribe populating its southern reaches. The

Hill Marias are grouped in clans of linear descent. Each clan has a clan deity, *pen*, who is worshipped. Members of a clan are called *bhai-band*, brother-relatives, and marital alliance among *bhai-bands* is prohibited. Marriage is permitted only with members of the wife's clan, called *akomama*. The institution of Ghotul is widely prevalent among the tribes. Young adults of both sexes spend the evenings together in a special large hut at the outskirts of the village. This is because young men are not encouraged to sleep in the one-room hut with their parents. In the Ghotul they are overseen by a senior member who does not allow sexual misconduct. They sing and dance at night and also sleep in the Ghotul. Young women return home around midnight, while men do so in the morning. The Ghotul is the centre of the community's sociocultural life.

Hill Marias believe that the land of Abujmarh is their collective domain, owned and looked after by the *pen* deities. All land is thus controlled by the community, and occupancy shifts in accordance with the needs of cultivation; there is little idea of individual ownership. Though the production process is considered loosely communal, the product itself belongs to the family that tills a particular plot. Because of their geographical and social isolation for a long time, the Hill Marias still

practise slash-and-burn cultivation on the hills. The economy of subsistence is supplemented by groups of families producing different types of goods and a weekly market called *hat*, which provides a place for exchange of these goods.

The Abujmarh hills are wooded with sal, teak, piyal or chiraunji, bahera, amla, and such other trees. Collecting forest produce and selling them to outsiders provides a supplementary means of income, which in turn enables purchase of outside goods. In this process, however, the tribals are often badly duped, as they are unaware of the ways and means of business in the outside world.

The Hill Maria is one of the most underdeveloped tribes in the Indian subcontinent. Their isolation from the rest of the world is still quite marked, as if their land were not part of any larger territory. Due to the scarcity of medical help and ignorance about personal hygiene, diseases like tuberculosis, lung infections, malaria, diarrhoea, and worm infestation are quite common. Severe ear and tooth infections as well as ailments born of malnutrition

are also widespread. Sexually transmitted diseases like Aids have started appearing recently through people having contact with the outside world.

In April 1977 Swami Atmananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur, happened to visit some of the Hill Maria villages at Orchha in the Abujmarh forest. He was stunned by the wretched and primitive life of the tribes living there. He was also shocked to find the ruthless exploitation to which they were exposed. He started cherishing the idea of bringing them the light of development and teaching them to live with dignity. But the idea could take concrete shape only from 1984, when the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi requested the Ramakrishna Mission to undertake some development work in the Abujmarh area. The Ramakrishna Mission headquarters commissioned Swami Atmananda for the job.

The government of Madhya Pradesh provided land and financial help to construct a residential school, a health centre, and a fair-price shop. On 2 August 1985 a humble beginning was made in a

Prayer time for primary classes



*Cleaning the hostel entrance**Study hours**Singing 'Ramakrishna Sharanam' on the way to the temple*

small tin shed where the photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda were installed and worshipped. On 2 July 1986 Vivekananda Vidyapith, the residential school, came into existence. The Vivekananda Institute of Social Health Welfare and Service (VISHWAS) was later created to undertake educational, health, and welfare activities for girls and women.

A fifty-two acre plot of land was selected to develop a model farm for training the tribal youth in agriculture, horticulture, dairy farming, fishery, poultry, and such other activities. It aimed at providing the tribal populace with the benefits of the mainstream modern village economy. Five centres were also opened deep inside Abujmahar in the hamlets of Akabeda, Kutul, Kachchapal, Irrakbhatti, and Kundla. Presently each centre has a residential school for boys and girls—with classes up to standard five in three places and up to standard eight in the other two—a prayer hall, a primary health centre, and a fair-price shop. A model agriculture demonstration farm covering fifteen acres has been established at each centre to provide help with modern cultivation techniques to the neighbouring villages. Water management techniques, storing methods, and other essential practices are also taught and developed here.

A Visit to Narainpur

Starting in the morning from the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur, we drive south on the National Highway 43. The road runs through a protected forest with towering sal and teak trees. A few crowded and dusty towns stick out amidst the verdant ambience like the proverbial sore thumb. After reaching Kondagaon we turn left, moving from the well metalled highway to a potholed road; we have another 50 km to go. Heaps of ballast and brickbats are piled up on both sides of the road, but no activity is in sight. Everything seems to be half done and stopped in a hurry. We are entering a Naxal zone. Finally we arrive in Narainpur town with clustered shops and ill-maintained buildings. In another ten minutes we



Playing Volleyball



Athletics outdoors

are in the sprawling premises of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, with its impressive temple and buildings, generously laid gardens and playgrounds, and thickety with flowering trees all around. What a relief after an exhausting journey!

Next morning we approach a small nondescript building in the campus; this is the office of the Anganwadi—a division of VISHWAS—with a couple of rooms full of posters providing instructions to expectant and nursing mothers. The middle-aged lady seated at the desk stands up as we enter and pays respects to the swamis taking us around. The glow of enthusiasm in her face and the confidence in her smile immediately establish her as a person totally dedicated to the Anganwadi cause. As she explains the Anganwadi activities, my friend asks her if she is scared to go to the villages under Naxal influence. She smiles and, brushing her forehead with two of her fingers, says, 'As long as the name of the Ramakrishna Mission is written here, not only am I safe, I am also respected.'

Training in gymnastics



The Anganwadi, literally 'courtyard playground', is part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) project of the government. Primarily a childcare centre in the remote villages, each Anganwadi also supplies supplementary nutrition to expectant and nursing mothers and to children under six. The Anganwadi workers also attend to immunization of children and women.

There are 68 Anganwadis and 101 mini Anganwadis operative under this centre—scattered all over Abujhmarh, even the remotest corner. The Anganwadi staff takes women under their care as soon as they learn about their pregnancy. Workers pay regular visits to their homes, advise them on food and hygiene, and supply additional nutrients and medicine as needed. After the baby is born, both mother and child continue to be under Anganwadi care till the child turns six. Then the child starts going to the nursery with other children and the mother is partially relieved. Till that time it is the responsibility of the Anganwadi worker to take

Workout in the school's gymnasium





Girls returning to their hostel

care of the child's nutrition, health, and education.

We visit the lady supervisor's quarters in the evening. As the conversation progresses, she gradually opens up, telling us about her experiences in Abujhmarh, the lifestyle and customs of the Maria people and the hardships they face. It is evident that the tribal people have her full sympathy and understanding, and she takes great pains to ensure that we do not misunderstand them.

The conversation is mostly about women and children. The lot of the womenfolk of Abujhmarh is rather hard. They are often the sole working hands in the family, gathering food and fuel, and attending to cleaning, cooking, and caring for children. They often have to go out into the forest early in the morning in search of foodstuff for the family, even in advanced stages of pregnancy. On return they fire the hearth and cook for family members. This back-breaking daily chore leaves them sick and tired. The infant mortality is very high—roughly 11 to 12%. However, birth rate is also quite high. Every couple generally has three to four children growing up. Yet, they are as womanly as a woman can be. They keep themselves clean with whatever water is available. At home they may wear only a small piece of cloth, but when they visit

the *hat* they dress themselves in colourful nylon saris. They are fond of ornaments and decorate their hands and feet with *godna*, a type of tattoo done with needles dipped in black ink.

Traditionally, Maria women are not supposed to stay with their families during menstruation. Every hamlet has a hut called *kurma-lon*, built outside its boundary, where women live during menstruation. No one is to visit her and men are not to use or cross the path leading to or round the hut. Similarly, during advanced pregnancy or just before delivery women are isolated in the

kurma-lon. Here also they stay alone and may even have to manage the delivery without help. They are supposed to remain confined till the newborn child's umbilical cord dries up and gets detached from its body. But now the Anganwadi workers look after pregnant mothers, stay with them during delivery, and teach them to nurse and care for the newborn.

Next morning, when the girls of the ashrama school were passing by the guest house wishing us good morning with bright smiling faces, I could not help wondering how difficult childbirth would have been for their grandmothers, and possibly even their mothers. Will the advances in health and hygiene that they represent soon percolate through the whole of Abujhmarh?

Girls marching





Tailoring class



Girls' hostel

In the afternoon the commandant of the local Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) unit—a tall, well-built, handsome man in uniform—visited the ashrama with his entourage. The swami in charge of the ashrama greeted the party with a smile, offered them tea, and talked to them cordially. The commandant was keen to know whether some of the school children would be interested to join the CRPF. ‘The pay is good and the future bright,’ he affirmed. The swami told him that students were free to choose whatever career they wished after completion of the class twelve course; the school did not interfere with their choice, though some initiatives have been taken to help the alumni in further studies. The party left praising the well-maintained campus.

Before I came to Abujmarh, I was concerned about children in conflict zones. But coming here and learning about their ways and means of living made me realize that helping children here is a rather complex problem: How is one to bring them the light of development without hurting their identity? The ancient rishis prayed: ‘*Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*; lead me from darkness to light.’ The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, is doing exactly that.

The Hat

The Sunday *hat* at Narainpur is the biggest local weekly market. The next day happens to be a Sunday and we proceed to see the *hat* in the afternoon. We have been kindly provided with an escort. He is an alumna of the ashrama school and is presently

employed by the Mission. In the *hat* we cannot differentiate him from other village folk in the way he walks, talks, laughs, and watches the cockfight. He is absolutely part of the crowd, but also a different man when talking to us, showing us the many goods in the *hat* and explaining local customs. His education has clearly not dissociated him from his tribal background.

By the time we arrive the *hat* is bursting with people. The most striking sight that greets us as we step out of our jeep is the burst of colours. Hundreds of women are moving about in gorgeously coloured nylon saris—bright red, brilliant pink, dazzling yellow, deep blue; some of them with prominent floral patterns. Virtually every woman is wearing a blouse and, unlike in the villages, there is no bare shoulder to be seen. Most of the women wear one or other ornament—of silver, gold, glass, or beads—bangles, necklaces, nose- and ear-rings. Whichever way we look, we see only women and girls, from teenagers to the elderly, some with babies. Men are conspicuously absent. This looks like a ‘women’s only’ *hat*. They have brought home-grown vegetables, a variety of leaves, local dates, dried fish, earthenware, brooms made of locally available phulbahari plants, and different household goods. There is a liquor corner on one side. Even here only women are sitting around. A thick white liquid is being served. There are no glasses. The women join their palms, put a plain sal leaf over it, and have the liquor poured in it.

At the centre of the *hat* is a large ornament stall with rows of hoops, heaps of chains, and piles of earrings. These are surely made of German silver. I hope the tribal people understand the difference. The shop is crowded with middle-aged and old women choosing, evaluating, checking, arguing, bargaining, and negotiating; but everything is done in a low voice, with patience, and maintaining every civilized manner. I must stress that all business in the *hat* is transacted quietly. There is no yelling, shouting, or abusing of any kind. In fact, from a distance one hardly notices the *hat*.

A few mothers stay back to visit their children at the school hostel. They generally bring some eatables—a blob of tamarind or a pack of biscuits—for the children. They are the guests of the Mission and are welcomed, served food, and put up in the guest house.



A view of the hat

Inside the Abujmarh Tract

Next morning we proceed to venture within the Abujmarh tract. Kundla is about 22 km from the ashrama. The road through the forest of tall trees and scanty undergrowth is rough. A narrow stretch of land has been cleared on both sides. The whole group is silent; the hum of the engine the only sound around. An occasional solitary hut comes into view. There never is a cluster. A sari-clad woman, or a child, or a cow appears on the hillside. On the road

are a few cyclists or a lone walker with a stick. All are scantily dressed. Against the vast expanse of the forest humans appear rather insignificant.

A nagging question has been bothering all of us. Can the children of these forests studying at the ashrama, go back to their villages after graduation, and adjust to the life there? Do they feel alienated from their families and childhood companions? The swami in charge guessed this legitimate query and arranged for a discussion with the students of the higher classes. Last evening we met the boys and girls in the school and also separately in the hostels. At school all of them were neatly dressed in pink uniforms; in the hostel, boys are in white and girls in blue. They talked about their villages, their families, and their aspirations. Boys were generally shy, especially in front of the girls, as is common during adolescence. Most of them come from remote villages, walk to the nearest Mission centre, and are picked up in four-wheelers or tractors. I was curious to know how they feel and behave back home during vacations. They must be feeling uneasy communicating with friends who stayed back with their primitive lifestyle. One of the boys surprised me when he said he had no problem getting along with his parents and friends. As was the practice before, they would all go out into the forest to collect food and fuel, come home for a meal, and go to sleep in the Ghotul. He sure misses the Mission, his classmates there, and the swamis, but home is equally enjoyable.

One of the girls in the hostel was more candid. She has two sisters who stayed back in the village. They have not had any exposure to school. The family elders and neighbours never wanted her also to join the school. It was her mother who firmly supported her. When she goes back, she immediately fits into her original lifestyle but feels an uneasy distance from her sisters, though this eases out after some time. When she grows up, she intends to 'do good' to her community and her country. In general, everybody has a positive view of their community and wants to improve it in future.

I am rudely shaken from my rumination over the previous day's interactions as the jeep jolts to a halt.

*Prayer hall of the school at Orchha*

Looking ahead I see only a fence with punched tape concertina coils blocking the road and extending far into the forest on either side. These coils are meant to deter intruders and attackers, psychologically and physically. A few Border Security Force men standing on the other side of the fence are looking at our jeep. The driver goes out to report to the officer on duty. Somebody comes to search the jeep: no cameras, radios, or cellphones are allowed inside. We have none of these, so the gate is opened and we enter into a different territory. There seems to be very little in terms of government machinery within Abujmarh. The road is rocky and half done.

On reaching Kundla we start our visit with the Anganwadi playroom. As we enter the small tin-roofed room, we find the children looking at us with curious eyes. They are aged three to six years, neatly dressed, and are playing with a variety of wood blocks. Next we visit the boys' hostel, kitchen, and dining room, all of which are kept clean and tidy and have an atmosphere of discipline. The school provides lessons up to class eight. The teachers are all local people. I feel quite at peace here; it is a pleasure to roam the playgrounds and gardens and visit the temple. There is little to suggest hostility or exploitation. Nobody around, adults or children, teachers or students, appears tense or apprehensive. Of course, our visit is rather short. We have to drive back to Narainpur for lunch.

In the evening, when the last of the sun's rays are receding beyond the horizon and shadows turning darker, I come out of our room into the open. From far beyond the notes of a hymn come floating towards me. Hostel boys, dressed in white shirts and dhotis, emerge from the shadows in a file as they proceed to the temple. No, they are not marching with military precision; they are like birds, breaking rules at every step, laughing for reasons known to them alone, and singing with joy and love. I watch them pass by, put off their sandals, wash their hands, and climb up the temple hall. The young faces with innocent smiles refresh my tired mind.

The schooling undertaken by the Mission is remarkable. The Anganwadis at the five centres deep within Abujmarh conduct kindergarten classes for children between three and five years. The Vivekananda Vidyapith, Narainpur, only admits students from the Anganwadis at the age of six in class one. The discipline here is very different from that of military schools. I enjoyed seeing the children running around, playing, laughing, and saying 'namaskar' while passing by. Special stress is laid on sports and games. Football, volleyball, kho-kho, athletics, and gymnastics are pursued regularly. The school football team has been participating at national-level meets. Much attention is also given to cultural activities: music, drama, drawing, dancing, and the like. A cultural competition is arranged in the month of April, when every class

Students at Orchha school

has to present a song, a dance, and a drama. Local songs, instrumental music, and dances of Abujhmaria, Chhattisgari, and Maharastrian origin are the common features of these festive occasions.

On the whole the school activities are comprehensive enough to provide a fruitful education, with particular stress on local tribal culture. It is a long and courageous walk from the primitive life of an Abujhmaria child to the making of a complete youth with the freedom to choose in an open world. I find the Mission's educational policy impressive. In fact, on 31 October 2010 the ashrama was jointly granted the 'Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration' for the year 2009.

Culminating our visit in the office of the principal, who is a swami, he hesitates to answer my queries. He then brings out two copies of *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation*. He hands me one of these and says, 'Open page twenty-four.' 'Here is a real teacher,' I say to myself, and obey his instruction. 'Read the last quotation,' he continues. This is the quotation with the famous line, 'You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.' He reads out all of it to me and explains the importance of sports and cultural activities in schools. This pocket-sized book is an important guide to the work here. It sets the phil-

osophy of the school in every sphere.

The swami then reads out another quotation. It talks about chastity, control of mind, and spirituality. By then my mind drifts to my childhood days. Our Bengali teacher had the habit of asking us to sit quiet without talking for five minutes in the class. It was such a punishment then. Here, everyday the students meditate for fifteen minutes after prayers, when all lights are switched off. They have been doing this since they were six. This is remarkable indeed. The next quotation is on *shraddha*, faith, and *gurugriha-vasa*, living at the teacher's home. *Shraddha*! How many times have I heard this word from my teachers. '*Shraddhavan labhate jnanam*; the faithful acquire knowledge.' I would have to bow to my teacher and touch his feet even in a crowded bus. He would joke, 'If you don't touch my feet, how do I bless you?' Good logic. None of my teachers are around anymore. Oh! How I miss them now.

I am standing alone in the playground with the temple and lush green trees on the horizon. They have been standing silently, eagerly witnessing the children being transported from darkness to light. They will all become conscientious citizens with a strong affinity for their native culture. I wish them all success.

PB





Child's Rights and Elementary Education in India

Prof. D P Chaudhri

OVER SIXTY YEARS AFTER the founding of the Republic of India, the state is legally obliged to provide elementary school education to all children between six and fourteen years of age. The Indian Constitution provides four levels of guarantees and protections for children. Its preamble expressly excludes all forms of discrimination. Article 21 broadly specifies fundamental rights. Article 45 exhorts the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen within ten years from the establishment of the republic in 1950. Articles 26 and 32 prohibit the employment of children in specified hazardous activities. However, virtually half of Indian children are denied these rights. In an attempt to remedy this, the Constitution was amended in 2002, enabling legislation, and in 2009 the Compulsory and Free Education Act was passed. From 1 April 2010 all state parties are required to implement child's right to schooling.

Potential for a Revolution in Education

India has missed two opportunities to regenerate its educational system; the Compulsory and Free Edu-

cation Act of 2009 is the third opportunity. In 1949, recognizing the urgency of catching up with scientifically advanced countries, the Indian government appointed a higher education commission and implemented its recommendations. However, elementary school education did not achieve a priority treatment.¹ This was the first and crucial missed opportunity, as it would have settled the foundations for an egalitarian and secular society consistent with the ideals of the Indian Constitution.

In 1966 the National Education Commission produced a detailed blueprint for achieving an educational revolution.² Most of its recommendations dealing with elementary school education were not implemented—political compulsions of the time needed different priorities, like eradication of poverty and the like. The report erroneously did not mention poverty directly, but did emphasize the foundational role of elementary education—interestingly, a number of its recommendations have been reiterated in the 2009 Act cited above. That was the second missed opportunity.

In the following decades serious indictments by renowned educationists, sociologists, and

economists were systematically ignored.³ However, their ideas persisted beyond vested interests, and now the new law compelling elementary school education presents the third opportunity to usher in an education revolution in India. Its implementation will favour both the excluded poor and the national economy. Financial resource constraints are not binding, and though political leaders' will to implement it may prove a major hurdle—yet again—this time the need to materialize it is too compelling. The reinforcing domestic, global, and social compulsions are stronger. Our understanding of the pervasive impact of quality elementary school education on labour productivity, demographic change, entitlements, governance, social change, global competitive advantages and their connectedness have also improved beyond recognition. Certain successful examples within India—like in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Himachal Pradesh—are replicable at national level with adequate political and financial commitments.

The *Education and National Development: Report of the Education Commission* was the first Indian comprehensive study of the links between national development and the foundational role of education. The commission had the benefit of expert knowledge available during 1964–6 in India and abroad. Historical evidence of the transformational role mass elementary education had played internationally—Japan, the Soviet Union, and other European countries—was common knowledge among policymakers. The influence of mass elementary education in the national economic growth and the social transformational potential was a hot research topic in Europe and North America during 1960s. T W Schultz of the Chicago University and the then young Amartya Sen of the Delhi School of Economics—both Noble laureates in economics in 1979 and 1998 respectively—actively participated in this debate, providing fresh ideas concerning the role of elementary education in human capital and human development.

Naik, who had been member secretary of the National Educational Commission from 1964

to 1966, summarizes that the new education, in the commission's view, should be based on a deep and widespread study of science and technology; should cultivate a capacity and willingness to work hard and be closely related to productivity; should strengthen social and national integration and help to create a more just and egalitarian social order; should consolidate democracy as a form of government and help us adopt it as a way of life; and should conduce us to strive to build social, moral, and spiritual values.⁴ Naik emphasises that education is a 'double-edged tool and that while wrong education could lead to social disintegration, the right kind of education can bring about effective national development' (13). He affirms:

The most effective way of breaking the vicious circle in which we find ourselves at present is to begin educational reconstruction in a big way. That is why it [the commission] placed the highest emphasis on the creation of a national system of education through an *educational revolution* ... If we desire to get out of this vicious circle wherein an unequalitarian society creates an unequalitarian education system and vice versa, we must mount a big offensive on both social and educational fronts (14, 70).

The commission had correctly identified the elitist character of Indian society. The two main forces of modernization, education and science and technology, have helped the elite to improve their standards of living, but have not yet done a corresponding service to the masses of India. The commission recommended the adoption of a new philosophy: faith in the common people; we must believe in their dignity, in their basic wisdom, and their inherent capacity to manage themselves. For creating a non-elitist, people-controlled and people-oriented egalitarian society, based on the values adumbrated in the preamble to the Constitution, a national system of education that favours everybody evenly is the foundation.

Compulsory Education

A resolution on the national system of education

was unanimously passed at the annual session of the Congress party in 1905, over a century ago. A similar one, spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi, dealing with free basic education was passed in 1931. In 1952 problems of implementing compulsory education were discussed at the behest of UNESCO. Next was the blueprint recommended by the National Commission on Education in 1966 discussed above. A national policy on education was announced in 1986, but only in 2001 the government of India ushered in its flagship project known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which focused mainly on the elementary stage. In 2002 the 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which makes elementary school education a fundamental right, was approved, and the operational requirements of that amendment are covered in The Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, which became a law on 1 April 2010.⁵

However, a national system of education with a degree of egalitarianism would be a challenge to implement, as there are several problems starting to arise from different sections of society. These will need to be dealt with resolutely but sensitively, for an egalitarian society without a level playing field in education would be an illusion. Also the risks of a dualistic model of education, partly due to elitism but mainly due to the additional cost of providing quality education with a uniform national minimum standard, is serious. Thus, cheating the poor with poor quality education may continue. There shall be no legal remedy or protection against such eventualities. The media, NGOs, think tanks, and universities interested in this issue of national importance need to take a proactive role in keeping tabs on the political leaders to make them deliver on their promises. The scale of resources required—1.78 lakh crore approximately over five years—is multiple of the projects that led to the scandalous corruption that hogged the headlines during 1990s. Insistence on accountability and transparency through the application of the law on right to infor-

mation would, hopefully, keep the implementation reasonably efficient. Systems put in place for monitoring and evaluation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan during the last five years need to be extended and improved further. Prognosis seems very promising, provided we are vigilant.

The Rights of the Child

The United Nations and its specialized agencies, beginning with the declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1948, have relentlessly pursued this issue. A Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989, and 171 out of 173 members have ratified it—the US and Somalia are the only exceptions. The right to school education is established in the CRC. The UN General Assembly adopted it in 1997, urged its member states to implement it, and also appointed a Special Rapporteur on the right to education under the Human Rights Commissioner.

Almost a century earlier Swami Vivekananda extensively discussed the need for according top priority to the provision of food and education to the masses of India, to thus achieve the desired regeneration of the nation at all levels. The need to create concern in the public was important to him. His knowledge of eastern and western philosophies, his first-hand observation of the Indian scenario of 1890s gained through extensive tours mainly on foot, and his later exposure to the US, Europe, and Japan—he was particularly impressed with Japanese system of education and social discipline—moved him to say:



The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, *to develop their lost individuality*. ... They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man, and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature. Our duty is to put ideas into their heads, they will do the rest. This is what is to be done in India.⁶

A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e. by spreading education among the masses (4.482).

Professor R K Dasgupta, in a series of lectures on Vivekananda's *Vedantic Socialism* echoes the swami:

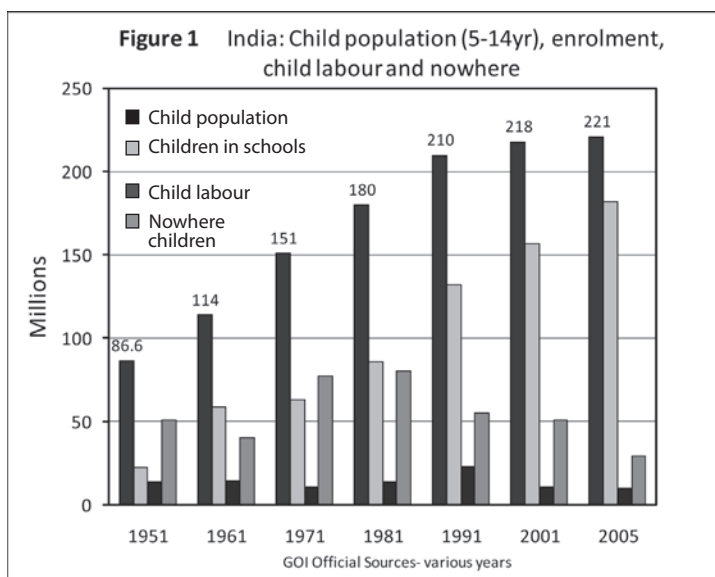
In our social history there has been throughout the ages a strong voice of protest against all forms of social injustice. But that protest has not established social justice in the country. We have denounced caste only to make it a divisive factor in

our national life. We have repudiated priestcraft only to rear up new classes of priest. We have opposed democracy to authoritarianism only to make our nation a loose confederation of oligarchies. We have urged equality only to perpetuate the worst form of inequality. We have discouraged accumulation of wealth only to make wealth the only source of power.⁷

A Report Card (1950–2010)

Child population acceleration from 1951 to 1981 has occurred due to demographic transition, where child mortality rates decline first and birth rates decline with a lag. The process has taken centuries, and more recently, with appropriate elementary education policies, just a few decades.⁸ For example, total fertility rate—average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime—in Kerala declined from 4.1 to 1.8 between 1971 and 1991, while in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh it is taking much longer. Expert projections suggest that annual child population growth in 2011 is expected to be around 1% for India.⁹ However, variations across states and districts would persist. A relatively young labour force has the potential for providing demographic dividends through accelerating economic growth, provided they are educated and productively employed.

Children in schools, in labour force, and nowhere¹⁰ are subsets of total child population. Boundaries between these are fuzzy, partly because of school dropout rates and partly due to varying measurement standards. Figure 1 reports the growth of child population, elementary education, child labour, and nowhere children from 1951 to 2005. These are optimistic estimates of elementary education in India for the first fifty years.¹¹ Child population growth has been a major challenge for elementary education planners in India between 1951 and 1991. Response in large populous states was disappointing and elsewhere barely adequate, with greater success for lower elementary edu-



cation stage (group age 6–11) and much less for upper elementary education stage (group age 11–14). Growth of elementary education during 1951–61 was promising, but stalled for the next three decades. Since 1981 the acceleration in school enrolments is unmistakable. The first decade of the twenty-first century seems to be showing a much greater promise than during the first fifty years of post-independence India. Incidence of child labour peaked in 1991, to a certain extent due to global pressures with threats of trade sanctions, but mainly as a result of a demographic transition in half of India as well as progressive elementary education and development strategies. Also the share of nowhere children that provide a pool from which child labour arises peaked a decade earlier in 1981.

Poverty and child labour are measurable—both stifle schooling. We know from the National Sample Survey that 97% of Indian children in labour force are over ten years old. Therefore, non-participation needs to be examined for this age group. Almost half of them are not in upper elementary classes; some children are stuck in lower stages at schools, some are in labour forces, but most of them are still nowhere. Our relative success in bringing children to lower elementary schools in recent years should not give the impression of mission accomplished. In Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Orissa, Jharkhand, Haryana, Gujarat, Bihar, and Assam the proportion of those excluded from upper elementary schools is over 60%. While there is no point to point correspondence between poverty and non-attendance, a pattern is noticeable. Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh stand out as success stories on both counts, while Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh are at the other extreme.

Overall, there is a partial success in responding to the demand for school education from those who could afford the direct and indirect costs of schooling in terms of textbooks, stationery, uniforms, and above all nutrition to sustain six hours a day in schools—throughout India, but particularly in states with positive education and development strategies.¹² The government of India has made a

major effort since 2001 to bring the excluded ones—child labour and nowhere children—to school. Provision of textbooks, stationery, and cooked hot mid-day meals—a recent addition—have considerably reduced the direct cost of education, particularly for those in poverty.¹³

However, a survey conducted in 2006 has served as a timely reminder that enrolment in school does not imply education and learning. Emerging evidence should ring alarm bells among the educationists. Based on field research, the survey reports that in 1996–7 in rural North India about half of the time there was no teaching going on in primary schools. Ten years later nothing had changed in this respect. School participation has improved dramatically, but classroom activity has not improved. This problem has several aspects.¹⁴

Drivers of Vicious and Virtuous Spirals

Economic growth is a complex process. It generates disequilibria across regions and sectors. The imbalances between sectors trigger shifts from agriculture to industry, and even within industry. The phenomenon is examined and referred to as structural change by the economists. Its pace is determined by the rate of growth of labour productivity and that of the economy. The role of public policy and economic incentives in stimulating or retarding these is enormous. Social awareness, sensitivity towards child labour issues, and government policies on elementary education and employment of children acquire urgency for policymakers in some states but not in others. The main determinants of the growth of child labour, both from the demand and supply side, are in the nature of a 'vicious spiral,' while factors affecting its decline are in the nature of a 'virtuous spiral'. Three main mutually reinforcing drivers leading to these outcomes, we believe, are demographic factors, technology, and public policy, including education policy. Slow demographic transition—incidence of high birth rate and declining child mortality rates—static or inferior technology reflected in low investment and low productivity per worker, and absence of child-



focused effective public policy lead to the vicious spiral, in which demand and supply of child labour grow through mutual dynamics, spiral type, and reinforcement. Both these patterns can be seen by an analysis of censuses data and related economic and demographic factors for different states of India.¹⁵

The states in the virtuous spiral have a number of favourable factors that have dampened the supply of child labour and nowhere children. With appropriate adjustment to their educational strategies, as outlined above, they can accelerate the process of moving faster within the virtuous spiral. The need for a big push in enrolment and retention of children (group age 5–14) in school, with emphasis on upper elementary level retention, is especially important in states caught in the vicious spiral.

Therefore, it is in the national interest for every state to embrace enthusiastically the universal strategy of elementary school education and implement it earnestly, irrespective of political differences.

Tasks Ahead


Establishing a national system of education is a major task. It demands the establishment of yardsticks for monitoring efficient allocation of financial and human resources. During the last five years major initial efforts have been made in this direction. The National University of Educational Planning and Administration has, with support from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the UNICEF, established District Information System

for Education, which has a dedicated website. Standardized data on major aspects of school infrastructure, management, teachers, and enrolments has been put in public domain, reducing thus the typical seven-to-eight-year lag to only one-year lag. Besides, they have prepared more than one million report cards and an Index of Educational Development. Data, methodologies, reports at district and state levels, and even software have been uploaded. Issues of gender, caste, and community are considered,

though unfortunately the core problem of poverty is not included—adding a child poverty index would enrich our understanding of connections as well as the debate on this matter. The *20th Human Development Report* has inputs from Oxford University centred on a Multidimensional Poverty Index—it includes educational poverty. This index estimates that there are 421 million (42.1 crore) poor in eight states of India: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.¹⁶

S K Chatterjee proposed a novel and holistic index of human development based on ideas culled from Vedantic principles and Swami Vivekananda's teachings. His is a measurement that has potential.¹⁷ However, the emerging indexes need to be discussed and refined for their utilization in tracking success, or lack of it, at district level. The one adopted needs to acquire acceptance, and the United Nations Development Programme's route also seems promising. State level institutes of development need to be involved in ensuring independent monitoring and evaluation on an ongoing basis.

But the crucial issue for the proper implementation of The Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 is adequate financing with a long term commitment. It would be forthcoming if, and only if, pressure and momentum is maintained. Monitoring of the promised improving quality of education would be an ongoing but daunting process. Implementing inclusive educational policies in elitist India would require social ac-

tivism on the part of NGOs, media, and the judiciary. I would like to reiterate that the role of think tanks and universities in undertaking research as well as its dissemination would be a critical input useable by activists in sustaining pressure. Keeping the leadership focused, particularly during the early phases of delivery effort, is the key to success. Grass-root activists have to watch out for the elitist teachers in well-endowed schools to protect children in poverty from potential daily humiliations. The goal is achievable in our democratic polity, provided the poor are made aware of their newly acquired right to education and reminded of their right to vote. We cannot undo the past, but the future is ours to make. 

Notes and References

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2. *Education and National Development: Report of the Education Commission* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1966).
3. In *Elementary Education in India: A Promise to Keep* (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1975), J P Naik details the negligence and urges urgent action. Myron Weiner, *The Child and the State in India* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1991) is a scathing indictment that blames the elitist nature of Indian society. J Dreze and Amartya Sen provide a regional perspective in *Indian Development* (Delhi: Oxford University, 1997); and in *Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Delhi: Oxford University, 1995) they remind policymakers that inclusive economic growth, development, and eradication of poverty are pipe dreams without universal elementary education.
4. See J P Naik, *The Education Commission and After* (New Delhi: APH Publishing, 1980), 12.
5. See Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India, <<http://education.nic.in/Elementary/elementaryRTE.asp>> accessed 25 September 2010.
6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.362.
7. R K Dasgupta, *Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Socialism* (Kolkata: Institute of Culture, 1995), 60.
8. For details see D P Chaudhri, *A Dynamic Profile of Child Labour in India* (New Delhi: ILO, 1996) and D P Chaudhri and E Wilson, 'Nutritional Poverty, School Education and Supply of Child Labour' in *Coming to Grip with Rural Child Work*, ed. Nira Ramachandran and Lionel Massum (New Delhi: Institute of Human Development, 2002).
9. *Population Projections for India and States 2001-2026*, (New Delhi: Office of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2006), 144-5, tables 17 and 18.
10. 'Nowhere children' is a term I used in 1996 to describe those children who are neither economically active nor in schools. Policymakers subsequently use labels as 'out of school' or 'excluded / included child labour'.
11. For details on why these are optimistic estimates see *A Dynamic Profile of Child Labour in India*, Chapter 1.
12. For participation in and desire for elementary education see *Public Report on Basic Education in India* (Delhi: Oxford University, 1999). For educational deprivations from rights perspective see D P Chaudhri, 'Basic Human Rights, Core Labour Standards and Relative Educational Deprivation of Youth in Modern Indian States', *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 43/1, (January-March, 2000); and R Govinda and M Bandyopadhyay, *Access to Elementary Education in India: Country Analytical Review* (New Delhi: National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2008).
13. Since 2004 the education management information system has been improving and expanding every year as part of India's District Education Programme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Both were partly funded with loans from the World Bank and foreign aid agencies. Accountability and transparency requirements of these are helping provide improvements.
14. See A Shiva Kumar et. al, "Education for all" is the Policy, but What Is the Reality?, *Frontline*, 26/6 (14-27 March 2019).
15. For a detailed analysis see *A Dynamic Profile of Child Labour in India*, Chapter 5.
16. Demographer Ashish Bose named these states BIMARU. I found them in the vicious spiral from a development perspective, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index tells us that most of India's poor live there. Each helps in a specific policy focus. For the new Multidimensional Poverty Index, developed at The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, see <<http://www.ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>> accessed 27 September 2010.
17. See S K Chatterjee, *Human Development: A Holistic Approach* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, 2009).

Swami Vivekananda and Human Dignity

Benulal Dhar

BEING HUMAN DENOTES living with a special moral status that distinguishes us from other animal species; in whatever conditions we may be, we are endowed with self-consciousness and altruism. This results in humans having an innate dignity or worth. Human dignity, and the special value societies attach to it, forms the core, the ground of what is called today human rights. The importance and recognition given to this idea of dignity in contemporary discourse of human rights is evident from several statements in the preamble of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, like this: 'Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.'¹

This recognition of human dignity as an underlying principle of contemporary conceptions of human rights has prompted many thinkers to explore it through various philosophical and religious traditions of the world. By stating that Adam was created in the 'image of God', the Old Testament of the Bible bestows on humans a priceless dignity. The concept of dignity occupies a central place in Emmanuel Kant's moral philosophy as well—he confers a special value to humans by declaring that individuals are 'ends in themselves'. For Kant, humans have to be treated in a way that reflects their special value above anything else. The bestowal of dignity on all members of the human race is prevalent not only in the West, but it is also illustrated in other cultural traditions of the world. The Indian tradition too joins this chorus based on its ancient spirituality, which is the central motive and principle of their people. The Upanishads equate the soul of humans with Brahman, the supreme Reality. Swami Vivekananda, the great

thinker and reformer of the nineteenth century, raised human dignity to a new height by reinterpreting the scriptures, making them practical in order to raise the illiterate, oppressed, underprivileged, downtrodden, and poor suffering masses of the world at large. This article modestly attempts to analyze, from the present-day perspective, Vivekananda's interpretation of a particular Vedantic dictum and its application to human life. This analysis also presents the swami as an apostle of what we today call human rights.

Human Rights' Roots

It would be quite appropriate to begin with a brief survey of the idea of human rights. Human rights is a recent name for what has traditionally been known as 'natural rights', 'rights of man', or 'civil rights'. It was the progeny of the school of natural law, which was represented by such European Enlightenment thinkers like Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704). A hundred years later the thinker and activist Thomas Paine (1737–1809) joined this school of thought. The common thread running through the Enlightenment was that human beings possess certain inherent rights known as 'natural rights'. As in the origins of civilization there was none to safeguard these crucial rights for human survival, the need arose to form a government that would guarantee the natural rights of people. Therefore, the legitimacy of any government is derived from its willingness and ability to protect citizens' natural rights. Though this notion provoked criticism from such thinkers as Edmund Burke (1729–97), Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), and Karl Marx (1818–83), it again came into the foreground of philosophical and political debate with the 1948 promul-

gation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, in which the term ‘natural rights’ was replaced by ‘human rights’.

Since then human rights are understood as rights that an individual is entitled to enjoy by virtue of being human, regardless of his or her nationality, culture, race, sex, age, or religion. These rights are referred to as ‘the civil and political rights’, ‘the economic, social, and cultural rights’, and some other collective rights as well. They are treated as birth-rights and are distinguished from acquired rights—such as the commercial rights of a publisher or the educational rights of a teacher. To deprive a human being of his or her inherent and inalienable rights would imply the *dehumanization* of the person.

Closely linked to this idea of human rights is the notion of human dignity, which is derived from the Latin word *dignitas*—a word denoting the possession of a higher social or political status, or the moral attributes associated with that status. Human rights are invoked to protect individuals against all forms of violence, oppression, and injustice perpetrated by other people, the state, or any private or public agency. Human rights provide a shield that defends the private space of a person against unjustified invasion by stronger entities. Without that private space individual growth and development becomes too hazardous. Thus, if people’s human rights are protected, the basics for a dignified and prosperous life in society is possible. It is in order to reach this end that Vivekananda articulated a Vedantic ground for human dignity.

Tat Tvam Asi

Unlike the modernist culture, which has set the standards of life based on materialism and consumerism, Indian traditional culture has religion and spirituality as its foundation. Again, modernist culture is in search of truth through the physical sciences by means of reason, while the ancient Indian culture’s quest for truth is not confined to the world of space and time, but goes beyond it to achieve spiritual Self-knowledge. It is this plane of spirituality that provides the broad framework for

the treatment of all inanimate things and animate beings. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilization. It is the turn which this aim imposes on all the rich and luxuriant variety of its forms and rhythms that gives to it its unique character. For even what it has in common with other cultures gets from that turn a stamp of striking originality and solitary greatness. A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion.²

In keeping with this spiritual tradition, the individual has been given an elevated place in Indian thought by proclaiming humans as part of the Divine or Brahman. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we find the dictum ‘*Tat tvam asi*; That thou art’, which means that the Atman in all beings is identical with the supreme Self. In this Upanishad there is the story of Shvetaketu, a boy who after completing his education in his guru’s house returned home. To test his knowledge, his father Uddalaka asked him some fundamental questions that the boy could not reply. Then, Uddalaka began to teach his son thus: ‘In the beginning all this was Existence, one only, without a second.’ ‘That (Existence) saw, “I shall become many.”’³ That Existence manifested Itself into the manifold universe; therefore, the origin of everything in Creation is Divine, is that Existence. As this statement would have remained merely a hypothesis unless it was not ascertained by some evidence, Uddalaka gave his son various concrete examples of it, each time concluding his statements by saying that Brahman is identical with Shvetaketu’s Self: ‘*Tat tvam asi, Shvetaketu*.’ By affirming the identification between the individual self and Brahman, the status of a person is ennobled. This concept has been suitably explained by I C Sharma:

According to the Upanishads, man is regarded as the highest reality, because of all the creatures of the world it is he who is self-conscious and most anxious to become infinite. In spite of finitude and imperfection man feels a great urge to attain infinity and

perfection. This keen desire to go from the limited to the unlimited, from the mortal to the immortal, and from the relative to the absolute state of existence is indicative of the fact that man's real self is not the individual self but the universal self. The innermost nature of man is not contradictory, relative and pluralistic existence, but it is non-contradictory, absolute and non-dualistic reality. In other words, man is potentially God, and the aim of all ethics is to convert this potentiality into an activity, manhood into divinity, and relativity into Absoluteness. This is what is meant by self-realization as the goal of the Upanishadic ethics.⁴

Humans, whose reality is the Atman, are endowed with the divine light and power of Brahman. This Reality is without distinction—such as religious, linguistic, racial, sexual, national, or social. Though Indian society has always stressed on the status of the individual in a social hierarchy, the identification of the individual with the Divine provides a dignity that places any person above all social customs and strata.

Vivekananda concurs with this Vedantic truth and also lays emphasis on other aspects of the dictum as well. He thought that emphasizing the divine origin of human beings would serve to make Vedanta practical and would enable the Indian masses to regain their lost faith. But for him, human beings comprise both physical and spiritual dimensions. The physical dimension consists of a biological and psychological system much more developed than other beings, as it exhibits a better organic unity and purpose; this, however, is considered humans' lower nature. The spiritual dimension relates to the Self, the

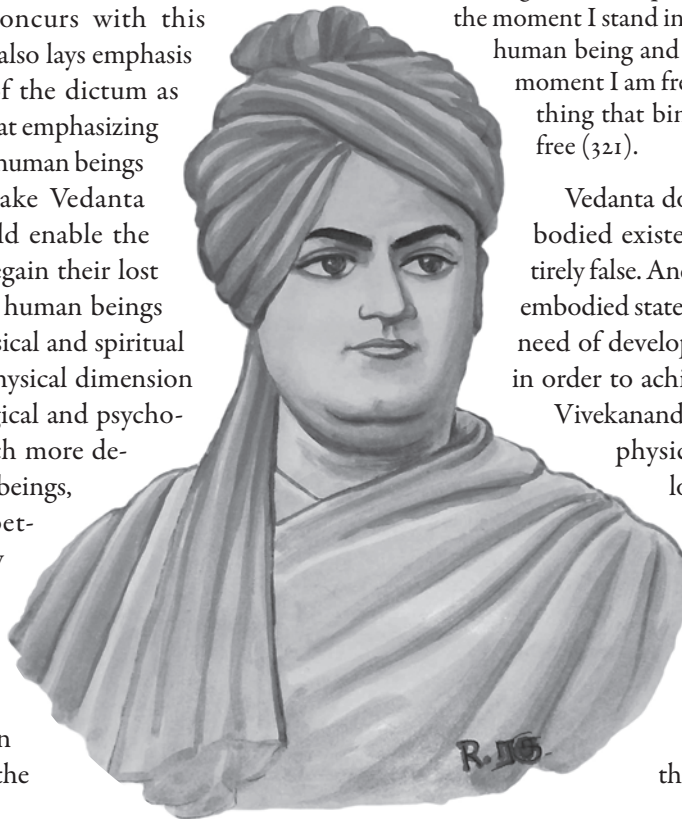
Atman of an individual; and this is humans' higher nature. In this context Vivekananda writes: 'And Man, the Infinite, Impersonal Man, is manifesting Himself as person. We the infinite have limited ourselves, as it were, into small parts. The Vedanta says that Infinity is our true nature; it will never vanish, it will abide for ever.'⁵

According to Vivekananda, Brahman is impersonal, is one. This one Reality is reflected in nature and becomes manifold. To clarify, Vivekananda uses the Vedantic analogy of *pratibimba*, reflection. Brahman is compared with the sun reflected in the water kept in different vessels; these reflections are apparent, the real sun is beyond these vessels. Likewise, the light of Brahman is reflected in every individual. Vivekananda says:

The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples. If I cannot worship in that, no other temple will be of any advantage. The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him—that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free (321).

Vedanta does not regard the embodied existence of humans as entirely false. And for Vivekananda, the embodied state of a human being is in need of development and perfection in order to achieve the spiritual goal.

Vivekananda considers the human physical dimension as follows: 'This human body is the greatest body in the universe, and a human being the greatest being. Man is higher than all animals, than all angels; none is greater than man' (1.142).



Vedanta in Practice

Vivekananda combines Vedantic principles with practice. He was not a philosopher in the traditional sense of the term, remaining satisfied with mere intellectual exercises. He had a mission and was a faithful messenger of the ancient Indian culture. His mission was to lift humankind in all spheres of life. He saw that human beings had forgotten their divine nature. During his extensive travels throughout India, he perceived the dehumanizing social, economic, and religious conditions of the common people. This made him fall back upon Vedantic principles as the solution for the restoration of self-confidence and human dignity. Realizing the stark reality of the Indian masses, he wrote:


The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads—those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past, the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty, the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of Advaita and whom we have hated with all our strength, the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of Lokachara (usage), to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice (3.431).

It pained him to see that while educated and upper-class Indians preached Vedantic egalitarianism, there existed vast disparities between rich and poor, high and low castes, literate and illiterate, privileged and downtrodden. Thus, Vivekananda's awareness of human degradation in various forms made him reinterpret Vedanta and thereby provide a philosophical foundation not only for his actions directed towards reducing the distressing social differences, but to awaken the real dignity of humankind as well. For this purpose he dedicated his life to the service of God in human form. His expression 'Daridra-Narayana', God the poor, to refer to the deprived masses indicates that he equated service of the poor with worship of God. Again, for Vivekananda it was not enough to merely say 'jiva

is Shiva', but he pursued Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of '*shiva jnane jiva seva*; serve the jiva knowing it to be Shiva'.

Vivekananda was not an ordinary spiritual guru who only preaches the scriptures to the common people; he was a karma yogi of the highest order promoting selfless work for social uplift. Grounded as he was in the lofty truths of Vedanta, he made a down-to-earth approach to the perennial problems of the masses. He declared: 'What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. First bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger' (3.432). Through this attitude Vivekananda takes a holistic approach to the perpetual problems of humankind and finds the best solution for them.

In view of the above analysis, Vivekananda can very well be called an apostle of modern 'human rights'. If we regard human dignity as the foundation of human rights, then Vivekananda's teachings bring human dignity at the level of the Divine. It is on this account that he can be taken as a human rights pioneer.

Vivekananda can also be called a human rights activist for his sincere crusade against all forms of oppression, prejudice, ignorance, and malpractice. His practical approach to Vedanta reconciles spirituality with material life and thereby aims at fulfilling both the spiritual and secular needs of humanity. 

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Mysticism and Mystic Visions

Swami Prabhavananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI has been described by Shankara as follows:

There is a continuous consciousness of the unity of Atman and Brahman. There is no longer any identification of the Atman with its coverings. All sense of duality is obliterated. There is pure, unified consciousness. The man who is well established in this consciousness is said to be illumined. ...

Even though his mind is dissolved in Brahman, he is fully awake, but free from the ignorance of waking life. He is fully conscious, but free from any craving. Such a man is said to be free even in this life.

For him, the sorrows of this world are over. Though he possesses a finite body, he remains united with the Infinite. His heart knows no anxiety. Such a man is said to be free even in this life.

Sri Ramakrishna would go into this *nirvikalpa samadhi* many times every day. Think of that! This I heard from my master. Generally, if you go into that state, you are through. But when Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness, he would speak of God the Mother; his chosen aspect of God did not lose its reality because he had known Brahman. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna showed how the divine aspects of the chosen ideal are also real. All the avatars kept a certain amount of separation in order to teach humankind. My master once told me: 'At times I see God playing, wearing so many masks. Then how can I teach? Then again I come down to the normal plane and see your weaknesses and defects, and I try to correct them.'

The text of this article forms part of the author's new book *Realizing God*, edited by Ms Edith Tipple.

Testing Spiritual Experiences

To be a true mystic three conditions are necessary. The first is human birth. The next is longing for God, for liberation. The third is the grace of a guru, a holy man.

How does a teacher teach? Not by words merely, because the truth of God is transmitted in silence. In the Upanishads we read: 'To many it is not given to hear of the Atman. Many, though they hear of it, do not understand it. Wonderful is he who speaks of it, intelligent is he who learns of it, blessed is he who, taught by a good teacher, is able to understand.'

In the West a distinction is made between religion and mysticism, that religion is a faith, a belief in certain dogmas or creeds and doctrines, certain rites and ceremonies, while mysticism is the belief that God can be known and realized. In India we make no distinction. Religion means not faith or belief in dogmas or doctrines, even in God, but in realizing God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that though the Hindu almanac forecasts how many inches of rain will fall in the year, one can squeeze that almanac and not a drop falls. Lectures and religious talks do not give you religion, but they can give you the urge to experience.

You can describe your experiences in life because you have something to compare them with, but the truth of God has never been expressed by the lips of man. It is indescribable, inexpressible, beyond feeling. Mystic visions and experiences have been described, and they are true, they are wonderful, but they are not experiences of the ultimate Reality. They are milestones on the path of progress. We must understand that. They show that

we are progressing, but not that we have attained the highest and ultimate Reality. One also must not despair at not having visions; not everyone needs them, or needs ecstasy. The main thing on the path of progress is to gain greater self-mastery, to find sweetness in the thought of God, and to broaden our outlook.

There are two conditions to test supreme experiences. First, if you see or experience something that can be known and experienced through other means, then that is not a true revelation. For instance, the power of clairvoyance, you see something at a distance, but if you actually go there, you can see it. Or you can be psychic and know how much money is in my pocket, or what I am thinking. That has nothing to do with spiritual life, because it is not the experience of God.

Another test is that spiritual knowledge is not opposed to reason. Though it transcends reason, it does not contradict it. You do not become irrational. In the Vedas we read that there are three steps: to hear about this truth from one who has experienced it—though not to believe him; to reason it out—otherwise you won't understand what he is saying; and then to meditate upon that in order to have the personal experience.

The fundamental truth is that your experience is what matters. You cannot enjoy the beauty of the moon by looking at a painting. You are the measure of all truths. Try to understand that your nature contains and reflects every level of Reality, from matter to God.

In the Upanishads we read: 'With mind illumined by the power of meditation, the wise know Him, the Blissful, the Immortal.' This is mysticism, that God can be known and realized and experienced within our own souls. This is religion.

In all our experiences, whether we are wise or dull, all our visions and experiences of this world are in duality or in the manifold. There is pleasure, there is pain. Sometimes we have wonderful feelings of divine presence; again we lose that feeling. Mystic vision is beyond intellectual understanding or mere feeling of the heart. It is an experience

of unalloyed bliss—no more dual throngs of life. In short, there is the empirical universe before us, which is perceived by our senses, and then we reason out with what you may call inferential knowledge. The Atman can be perceived, but not with these eyes or these ears. That power of realization is in every one of us and can be developed by the power of meditation. This is a subtle superconscious power that is not given only to a few, but is in every human being. In that experience is the fulfilment.

In a Christ or a Buddha, a Krishna or a Ramakrishna, that power was evolved, and there have been great mystics and saints and sages, some still living, in whom this power is also evolved. And it can be evolved by every one of us. My master often pointed out to us: 'Spiritual life begins after you attain the vision of God in samadhi.' Before that we only play with words, quote scriptures, talk about God. It is merely talk until this vision opens up.

It is beyond self-consciousness, though you are fully conscious. You see, in the unconscious state there is no ego, and in this transcendental state there is no ego—but there is full consciousness. Swami Vivekananda explained the difference between deep sleep, when you go unconscious, and samadhi, in which you *appear* to be unconscious. He said that if you go to sleep a fool, you wake up a fool; but if you go into the transcendental state once, you come out wise, completely transformed. And you become a blessing to all. Then you live in love and service for all humankind.

The great Shankara said: 'Scriptures are not the only authority for the acceptance of the truth of Self; but one must have one's own personal experience.' In the Mahabharata we read: 'He who has no personal knowledge, but has heard many things cannot understand the scriptures, even as a spoon has no idea of the taste of the soup.' And Mohammed said that one who does not have personal knowledge but is full of scriptural knowledge is like an ass carrying a load of books.

Shankara also pointed out that if worldliness persists, one has not attained to the knowledge of

Brahman. Worldliness means, in one short word, selfishness—attachment to the little self, to ‘me and mine’. The heart of one who has attained the knowledge of Brahman becomes big. A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who was in California [Swami Turiyananda] was told by Swami Vivekananda, ‘Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so called religion. ... But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel.’ ‘When I was twenty ... I would not walk on the same footpath on the theatre-side of the streets. ... At thirty-three I can live in the same house with prostitutes and never would think of saying a word of reproach to them.’ My master one day told me: ‘Go, practice japa, repeat the name of the Lord, meditate, and then your heart will grow in compassion and sympathy for the sufferings of others.’ That’s what happens.

Spiritual aspirants try to avoid the psychic plane and get into the causal plane, as it were. The causal plane is God as the Creator, the cause of this universe, realized as a personal being. Here the attraction is so great that you want to break through all barriers and become one with him. And when you do that, you attain *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the supreme experience of unitary consciousness.

Samadhi is known by its fruits. Your life becomes transformed. Purity, compassion, love, sympathy, self-mastery, freedom from passions, all these characteristics come to you.

The Signs of Mystics

Infinite knowledge is not intellectual knowledge, nor is it a feeling of the heart. Intellect and heart both play an important part in attaining it, and it is not that we have to give up either our reasoning power or the feeling of our hearts. But these are only the means and methods. Infinite knowledge transcends the intellect and all feeling. You see, a realized soul lives in the body with an apparent consciousness of the body, apparently subject to heat and cold and the so-called experiences of the world, but in a moment can withdraw and be free from body-consciousness or identification with the moods of the mind.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give this illustration: ‘When you scoop out the soft kernel from a green coconut, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell at the same time. But in the case of a ripe and dry coconut, the shell and kernel are separated from each other, when you shake the fruit you can feel the kernel rattling inside.’ A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna once told me: ‘Now I see the Atman as completely separate and detached from the body.’

A surgeon once operated on Swami Turiyananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was not under anaesthesia and spoke to the disciples joyfully while the surgeon operated. After that the surgeon thought the swami was always detached from his body, so when Swami Turiyananda had a spot on his big toe, the surgeon came and prostrated and, without the knowledge of the swami, took the knife and cut the toe. Swami Turiyananda shuddered and said: ‘You should have told me. I could have prepared myself.’

You have to be holy to recognize holiness. Outwardly holy people behave like everybody else, but if you live with them, you will find something different. The illustration given is of a burnt rope. There is the appearance of a rope, but it cannot bind. Shankara says: ‘In him who attains this unitive knowledge, the worldliness that affected him previously is completely gone. If you find that worldliness attached to him, then know that he has not attained that wisdom.’ Sri Ramakrishna defined this worldliness as lust and greed. One who has attained this knowledge of God is freed from lust and greed. That is the effect that comes.

Why must one be a mystic? Is it not enough just to be good, moral, ethical, and to do good to the world? Why should we have to see God? Matthew Arnold defined religion as an ‘ethical life with a touch of emotionalism’. But what is ethical life? To be completely selfless; to be completely egoless. Can you really practise what is called humanism without love for God? It is not possible. You become egotistic if all you do is to do good.

(Continued on page 691)

Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

**89. Eteṣu koṣeṣu madhye vijñānamayo
jñāna-śaktimān kartr-rūpaḥ. Manomaya
icchā-śaktimān karaṇa-rūpaḥ.
Prāṇamayaḥ kriyā-śaktimān kārya-
rūpaḥ. Yogyatvāt-evameteṣāṃ vibhāga
iti varṇayanti. Etat-kośa-trayaṃ militaṃ
sat-sūkṣma-śarīram-ity-ucyate.**

Among these sheaths, the sheath of intelligence, endowed with the power of knowledge, is the agent; the mental sheath, endowed with will power, is the instrument; and the vital sheath, endowed with activity, is the product. This division has been made according to their respective functions. These three sheaths together constitute the subtle body.

HERE IT IS BEING STATED that the three sheaths have three powers. First seeing an object, *jñāna-śakti*, power of knowledge, is generated. Knowledge is power. This is followed by vibrations in the mind and the vital sheath. If there is no discrimination and renunciation or spiritual practice, and if one is engaged only in eating, drinking, and gossiping, then one's knowledge too will be of that type. With the power of that knowledge, the mind too will engage in a corresponding type of activity. This sheath of knowledge is the *kartā*, functional agent. This alone will activate all other aspects of the personality. This power of

knowledge gets transformed into will power, such as the desire to enjoy. Mind is the instrument, and if it gets attached to objects of enjoyment, one is done for. The *prāṇamaya kośa* is simply a product. It functions like a slave in accordance with the conscious activity, vibrations, of the will. It is always active, perpetually dynamic, *kriyā-śaktimān*. Mind has will, strong desires. Realizing all these aspects of your being, mould your consciousness with the help of spiritual practice.

Together, these sheaths constitute the subtle personality. This inner personality is all-important. Being polite externally will not last long. Transform your inner personality. External transformation will take place automatically.

**90. Atrāpy-akhila-sūkṣma-śarīram-eka-
buddhi-viśayatayā vanavaj-jalāśayavad-
vā samaṣṭir-aneka-buddhi-viśayatayā
vrkṣavaj-jalavad-vā vyaṣṭir-apī bhavati.**

Here also the sum total of all the subtle bodies, when looked upon as one, like a forest or a reservoir, is called samaṣṭi, aggregate, and when viewed as many, like the trees or quantities of water, is called vyaṣṭi, individual.

According to the Upanishads, the *samaṣṭi* and the *vyaṣṭi* are made on the same plan. All things everywhere fall by the same law an apple falls, be it at Nagpur or Delhi or Kolkata. Just as the various *kośas* are interconnected, similarly are they interconnected in every other individual. God is present behind every plane of existence within you. Similarly, God is present behind every phase of existence in the *samaṣṭi*, the aggregate, behind everyone.

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

**91. Etat samaṣṭy-upahitaṁ caitanyaṁ
sūtrātmā hiraṇyagarbhaḥ prāṇś-cety-
ucyate sarvatrānusyūtātvaḥ-jñānecchā-
kriyā-śaktimad-upahitātvaḥ-ca.**

Consciousness associated with this totality is called Sutrātma, Hiranyagarbha, Prana, and the like, because it is immanent and because it identifies itself with the five great uncompounded elements endowed with the powers of knowledge, will, and activity.

The one God is sporting as the inner personality of all creatures, like the one thread passing through all the flowers of a garland. Sutrātma, Hiranyagarbha, and Prana are one and the same Reality pervading all beings. Difference in name is due to difference in the form of expression. That which manifests as knowledge in all beings is called Sutrātma. When it expresses as will in all creatures, it is called Hiranyagarbha and when as dynamism or activity, it is called Prana.

**92. Asya iṣā samaṣṭiḥ sthūla-
prapañcāpekṣayā sūkṣmatvāt-sūkṣma-
śarīraṁ vijñānamayādi-kośa-trayaṁ
jāgrad-vāsanāmayatvāt-svapno'ta-eva
sthūla-prapañca-laya-sthānam-iti cocyate.**

This aggregate made up of the three sheaths, the vijñānamaya kośa and others (which forms the limiting adjunct) of Hiranyagarbha, is called the subtle body, as it is finer than the gross universe. It is also called the dream state, as it consists of the impressions of the waking state; and for that very reason it is known as the place of merger for the gross universe.

**93. Etad-vyaṣṭy-upahitaṁ caitanyaṁ taijasa
bhavati tejomayāntaḥkaraṇopahitātvaḥ.**

Consciousness associated with each individual subtle body is known as taijasa (full of light), on account of its being associated with the effulgent inner organ, antaḥkaraṇa.

**94. Asyāpīyaṁ vyaṣṭiḥ sthūla-śarīrāpekṣayā
sūkṣmatvād-iti hetor-eva sūkṣma-śarīraṁ
vijñānamayādi-kośa-trayaṁ jāgrad-**

**vāsanāmayatvāt-svapno'ta-eva
sthūla-śarīra-laya-sthānam-iti cocyate.**

The individual limiting adjunct of taijasa too, made up of the three sheaths—the vijñānamaya kośa and others—is called the subtle body, as it is finer than the gross body. It is also called the dream state, as it consists of the impressions of the waking state; and for that very reason it is known as the place of merger for the gross body.

**95. Etaṁ sūtrātma-taijasau tadāniṁ mano-
vṛttibhiḥ sūkṣma-viśayān-anubhavataḥ
'praviviktabhuk-taijasaḥ' ity-ādi-śruteḥ.**

The Sutrātma and taijasa, at that time (of dream sleep) experience the subtle objects through (the subtle) functioning of the mind. Witness such Shruti passages as, 'Taijasa is the enjoyer of subtle objects.' (Mandukya Upanishad, 4).

Just as there is a subtle body, inner personality, in you, similarly, there is an inner cosmic personality in every person. So, no one must be hated or condemned. Instead, have an encompassing love for all.

The subtle impressions, saṁskaras, of past actions reside in the subtle body. The vibrations of all the actions and thoughts of the gross state gradually subside and go into the subtle body and remain stored there as saṁskaras, even after the action or thinking is over. They reappear in dreams. It is for this reason that this subtle personality is also called dream personality. This subtle body is also present in the waking state, but you cannot see it; only yogis can. Yogis identify themselves with the cosmic inner personality. This individual inner personality and the cosmic inner personality are one and the same. Therefore, if yogis so wish, they can know the vibrations arising in the minds of others.

These saṁskaras reappear when they find an association. So, be cautious and practise self-control till they are sublimated by spiritual practice. In the dream state enjoyment is subtle. There is no actual contact between the senses and the objects of sense

enjoyment. In the waking state there is actual contact of gross objects with the senses. As long as you do not realize Brahman, so long will both types of enjoyment remain. That which cannot be done during the waking state at the gross level—due to social restraints, fear of the police, or worry about loss of name and fame—the mind does at the subtle level. Hence, one must be careful: *Sādhū sāvadbhāna*; O monk, beware! Transcend both the tendencies towards enjoyment by the real knowledge that Brahman alone is sporting as the cosmos through its power of *mayā*. Cultivate the knowledge that there is no subject-object duality anywhere. Brahman alone exists. This will lead to *vairāgya*, detachment, and purification.

96. Atrāpi samaṣṭi-vyaṣṭyos-tad-upahita-sūtrātma-taijasayor-vana-vṛkṣavat-tad-avacchinnākāśavac-ca jalāśaya-jalavat-tad-gata-pratibimbākāśavac-cābhedaḥ.

Here also the aggregate and individual subtle bodies are non-different, like a forest and its trees or like a lake and its waters, and the Sūtratma and taijasa, which have those bodies as their limiting adjuncts, are also non-different, like the space enclosed by a forest and its trees or like the sky reflected in the lake and its waters.

97. Evaṁ sūkṣma-śarīrotpattiḥ.

Thus do the subtle bodies originate.

Sadananda is discussing Sūtratma and *taijasa* to stress that the individual and the aggregate are built on the same plan. The three aspects of nature and the Reality behind it are present in the *samaṣṭi* as well as in the *vyaṣṭi*. But some people, for instance poets, see Reality, God, only in the *samaṣṭi*, while some philosophers see it only in the *vyaṣṭi*. People try to see God in the places of pilgrimage, but do not see him in their own selves. These are two extremes, and are narrow outlooks. The Upanishads always refer to the individual and cosmic aspects side by side. This will give you a broad, universal

outlook on life. For a practically successful spiritual life, avoid both the extremes.

It has been mentioned that the subtle bodies and the subtle universe are the sport, *lila*, of God. Next, to show that all phases of your personality, including the gross aspect, are the sport of God carried on by his *māyā-śakti*, Sadananda describes the gross personality. We shall have to transcend even this gross universe. Know for certain that this too is illusory. God, who first manifests himself as the subtle elements, becomes the gross world as well. In every particle, in every atom and molecule of matter, God is present. Such illumination will transform your life, and you will feel that you are nothing.

98. Sthūla-bhūtāni tu pañcīkṛtāni.

But the gross elements are all compounded.

99. Pañcīkaraṇaṁ tvākāśādi-pañcasvekaikaṁ dvidhā samaṁ vibhajya teṣu daśasu bhāgeṣu prāthamikān-pañca-bhāgān-pratyekaṁ caturdhā samaṁ vibhajya teṣāṁ caturṇāṁ bhāgānāṁ sva-sva-dvitiyārdha-bhāga-parityāgena bhāgāntareṣu yojanam.

The compounding takes place thus: Each of the five elements, namely ākāśa and the rest, is divided into two equal parts; of the ten parts thus produced, five—being the first half of each element—are each subdivided into four equal parts. Then, one of these quarters from each of the other four elements is added to one half of each element, while the other half is left out.

100. Tad-uktaṁ: 'Dvidhā vidhāya caikaikaṁ caturdhā prathamam punaḥ; Sva-svetara-dvitiyāṁśair-yojanāt-pañca pañcate' iti.

Thus, it has been said: 'By dividing each element into two equal parts, and subdividing the first half of each element into four equal parts, and then adding to the other half of each element one sub-division

of each of the remaining four, each element becomes five in one.' (Panchadashi, 1.27).

taste; and earth manifests sound, touch, form, taste, and smell.

The formation of gross elements from the combination of subtle elements is also a systematic process, as described here. The cause of this combination is the *māyā-śakti* of God. Since these combinations are taking place spontaneously and systematically, there must be some intelligent cosmic conscious principle responsible for it. In the Upanishads this principle is called the Universal Mind, Hiranyagarbha.

**101. Asyāprāmāṇyaṁ nāśaṅkaniyaṁ
trivṛt-karaṇa-śruteḥ
pañcīkaraṇasyāpy-upalakṣaṇatvāt.**

The authoritativeness of this method of compounding should not be questioned, for the triple combination described in the Shruti indirectly refers to this.

In some scriptures this process of formation of gross matter is called *trivṛt-karaṇa*, triplication—combination of three elements—instead of *pañcīkaraṇa*, quintuplication. In that case, the other two elements are implied by the three.

**102. Pañcānāṁ pañcātmakatve samāne'pi
teṣu ca 'vaiśeṣyāt-tu tadvādas-tadvādaḥ'
iti nyāyenākāśādi-vyapadeśaḥ
sambhavati.**

Though these five gross elements are alike in so far as each of them contains the five elements, yet they are differently named as ākāśa and the like owing to the 'preponderance of a particular element in them' (Brahma Sutra, 2.4.22).

**103. Tadānim-ākāśe śabda'bhivyajyate
vāyau śabda-sparśāvagnau
śabda-sparśa-rūpāṇy-apsu śabda-
sparśa-rūpa-rasāḥ pṛthivyāṁ
śabda-sparśa-rūpa-rasa-gandhāṣca.**

At that time ākāśa manifests sound; air manifests sound and touch; fire sound, touch, and form; water sound, touch, form, and

For the combination of these elements there is a law. There is no change in one half of each element, while the other half is replaced by portions (one-eighth) of the other four elements. This is the beauty: it is a very systematic process and shows that there must be some conscious intelligent principle guiding it. This process is also referred to in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.3.

**104. Etebhyaḥ pañcīkṛtebhyo bhūtebhyo
bhūr-bhuvah-svar-mahar-janas-tapaḥ-
satyam-ity-etan-nāmakānām-upary-
upari- vidyamānānām-atala-vitala-
sutala-rasātala-talātala-mahātala-pātāla-
nāmakānām-adho'dho-vidyamānānām
lokānām brahmāṇḍasya tadantargata-
caturvidha-sthūla-śarīrāṇām
tad-ucitānām-anna-pānādīnām
cotpattirbhavati.**

From these compounded elements have evolved the seven planes, existing one above the other, namely Bhu, Bhuvā, Sva, Maha, Jana, Tapa, and Satya; and the seven nether planes, one below the other, namely Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasātala, Talātala, Mahātala, and Pātala; the world, the four kinds of gross bodies contained in it, together with the food and drink appropriate to them.

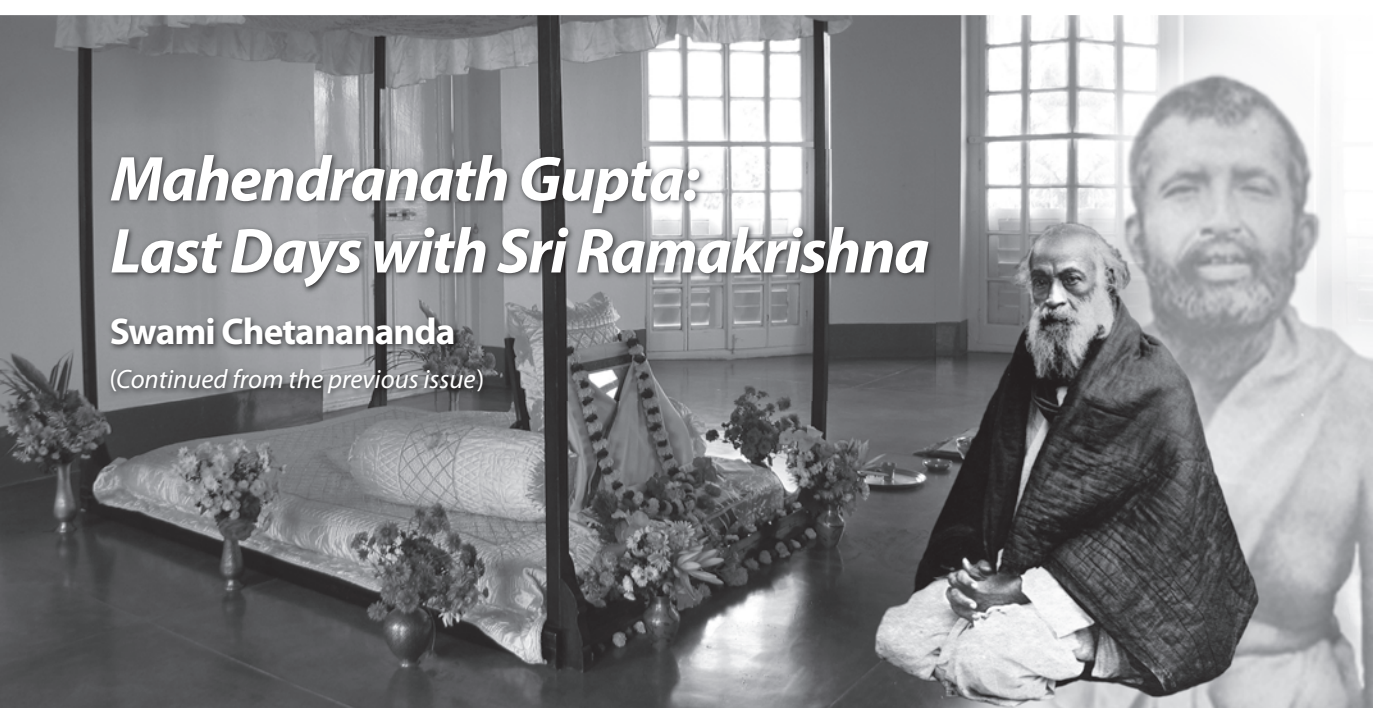
The cosmos comes into being through 'divine energy' and not through 'manifest energy'. Hence, there is no error in it. The same Brahman has manifested as the whole cosmos, including all *lokas*, celestial spheres, the creatures they contain, as well as the objects of their enjoyment. This process of evolution has been described here with the sole purpose of arousing in us the consciousness that everything is Brahman and there is nothing anywhere other than it. The question of 'I and mine', of subject and object, does not arise. This is the basis of the consciousness that one must have in spiritual life.

(To be continued)

Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 1886 • Since 2 January the Master's illness had worsened. He was being treated by Navin Pal, an Ayurvedic doctor, who was in the Master's room along with others. The Master softly said: 'Enough! Let this body go. People call me an avatara, but now see my condition.' After a while he was in a joyful mood. Again he began to cough, but it soon stopped. Dr Navin Pal left. The Master said to Rakhal: 'You cry over my suffering. Let the body go soon.' Then he said to M: 'Mahindar, it is better to leave this world.' In the meantime Dr Pratap Majumdar arrived and the Master asked him for a homeopathic medicine.

Tuesday, 12 January 1886 • It was the day of Makara Sankranti, an auspicious day. Every year, during this season, monks and pilgrims from all over India go to Gangasagar, the confluence of the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal, for a holy bath. Many pilgrims go by boat from the Jagannath Ghat of Calcutta. Senior Gopal had a little money and wanted to acquire merit by offering cloths to holy people on that auspicious day; so he bought twelve pieces of cloth and twelve rosaries of Rudraksha beads to distribute among the monks. He dyed the cloths the ochre colour himself. When the Master heard about it, he said to Gopal: 'You will attain a thousand times

more merit if you present those ochre cloths and rosaries to my children rather than giving them to the monks at Jagannath Ghat. Where else will you find such all-renouncing monks? Each of them is equal to a thousand monks.' This changed Gopal's mind.

On Tuesday, 12 January 1886—Makara Sankranti—Gopal gave the ochre clothes and rosaries to the Master, who touched them and sanctified them with a mantra. He himself then distributed them among his young disciples. They put on the ochre clothes and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased to see them in monastic clothes and blessed them. The disciples who received the ochre clothes were: Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjana, Baburam, Shashi, Sharat, Kali, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, and Gopal. The twelfth cloth and rosary, according to the Master's instruction, were set aside for Girish Ghosh. Later Girish touched them to his head and felt the Master's special blessing. In this sense it may be said that the Sri Ramakrishna Order was founded by Sri Ramakrishna himself, although it did not come into official existence until after his death.¹⁵

M arrived in the afternoon and went directly to Sri Ramakrishna, who asked M to rub his stomach with oil.

Wednesday, 13 January 1886 • At noon the Master's condition was critical. His breathing

almost stopped. M arrived at 4.30 p.m. and found Dr Majumdar in the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna said to the doctor with folded hands: 'Too much pain. Please cure this disease.'

Ramchandra Datta strongly believed that the Master was an incarnation of God and could cure his disease at any time. The Master said to M: 'I don't like what Ram is saying. You see, when you assume a human body, physical ailments are inevitable.' The disciples were passionately and devotedly serving the Master day and night. M also stayed that night.

Thursday, 14 January 1886 • Dr Kalachand came to check the Master's condition. M entered the Master's room and found his own wife seated there. She had dreamt about the Master's critical condition, so she came to see him. M asked her to go downstairs. Despite his illness, the Master was having fun by imitating women who pretend to be in love. After a while he remarked: 'Ram Datta is a doctor and goes to work wearing a turban. He has declared that I am God.'

The Master tried to eat some farina pudding, but it was hard for him to swallow anything. Much later, Holy Mother recalled: 'Some days farina pudding would come out from his nose and throat. Oh, what suffering he had!'

It was winter, but the Master felt as if he were burning. Shashi was sitting inside the mosquito curtain and fanning the Master. M was seated outside the curtain. The Master asked him to sit inside the curtain also, as there were too many mosquitoes.

Friday, 15 January 1886 • M hurriedly left work and reached Kashipur at noon. He saw that a piece of thick cloth had been wrapped around Sri Ramakrishna's throat to prevent it from swelling. Bhavanath held him up in a sitting position and Yogin and Latu were trying to feed him.

Girish, Ramchandra, M, and others were seated in the Master's room. Girish wholeheartedly prayed that the Master's pain be relieved. Shortly thereafter the Master spit up some phlegm and then felt better. He said: 'Now I can swallow a little, but the swelling has not gone down.' M stayed at Kashipur that night. At 4.15 a.m. he helped the

Master to rinse his mouth with warm water. He left for home at 5.30 a.m.

Saturday, 16 January 1886 • M went to Dr Sarkar to report the Master's condition and then went to Vidyasagar's school to carry out his regular duties. At noon he went to Kashipur and informed Sri Ramakrishna that the doctor would come. After lunch the Master had difficulty breathing. M felt helpless; nevertheless, he rubbed the Master's feet. Dr Sarkar arrived soon afterwards, having picked up Dr Pratap Majumdar in his carriage. Dr Sarkar gave the Master a dose of Conium, which provided some relief.

Dr Sarkar told the devotees: 'I did not expect the disease to spread so far. There is no earthly remedy that can arrest the progress of the disease. I have been saying this from the beginning and I say this even now. The cancer has spread to the shoulders, neck, and other places.'

M stayed with the Master that night. At midnight Sri Ramakrishna asked for some food. Latu prepared some pudding, and the Master ate a little.

Sunday, 17 January 1886 • At 2.00 p.m. Girish, Devendra, and M gathered under the mango tree on the lawn and discussed the Master's divinity. At 7.00 p.m. M and Dr Trailokyanath Bandyopadhyay were with the Master in his room. The Master was gasping for breath and suffering terribly.

Monday, 18 January 1886 • At 7.00 p.m. M, Devendra, and Dwija arrived at Kashipur. The Master went into samadhi while listening to the disciples' singing. M bowed down to the Master and then returned home with Ramchandra and Surendra.

Tuesday, 19 January 1886 • M arrived at the Kashipur house in the morning and found the Master asleep. Although he had been coughing, he was feeling a little better. The swelling in his throat had subsided a bit. Sri Ramakrishna was wearing an amulet of Lord Tarakeshwar Shiva as requested by Ramchandra and other devotees. The Master advised M to visit Tarakeshwar Shiva the next Sunday and M agreed. He then asked M to buy a carpet for him. M stayed the night.

Wednesday, 20 January 1886 • At 4.00 p.m. M went to Barabazar to buy a carpet and a pair of slippers for the Master. He then took a share carriage to Kashipur. He heard that the Master had haemorrhaged twice. M then went upstairs to show Sri Ramakrishna what he had bought.

Thursday, 21 January 1886 • M went to Kashipur at 4.30 p.m., after attending the Brahmo festival. The Master told him that he had visited Tarakeshwar Shiva on three occasions. Baburam's house was near Tarakeshwar, so M got directions from him. Sitting on the southern veranda, Sri Ramakrishna drew some pictures with a piece of charcoal: such as a face of an elephant, a bird, Lord Shiva Taraknath, and so on.

Friday, 22 January 1886 • M arrived at 4.30 p.m. and found Girish waiting in the ground-floor hall. They both went upstairs to the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna was chewing a myrobalan fruit, which helped ease the pain in his throat. Girish asked the Master to eat some food. Shashi and Kali took the Master to the adjacent bathroom. When he returned to the room, he went to bed.

Sunday, 24 January 1886 • M went to Tarakeshwar with his wife, his son Nati, and a maid-servant. Following the Master's instructions he touched the deity while performing worship.

Monday, 25 January 1886 • At 4.30 a.m. M left for Kashipur and found the Master in bed. M gave the Master a detailed account of his pilgrimage to Tarakeshwar, which made the Master happy. The Master asked M to visit Lord Jagannath in Puri next.

Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Narendra's mother, came to see Sri Ramakrishna with her youngest son. She was upset, seeing Narendra in an ochre cloth. The Master consoled her, saying: "The doctor has forbidden me to speak, but I must talk to you. I am glad that you have come. Please take Narendra back home. I told him: "You will have to look after your mother and younger brothers. It is not the right time for you to put on ochre cloth." Narendra went with his mother by carriage, but got down at Baghbazar to run an errand.

Thursday, 28 January 1886 • M went to visit Sisir Kumar Ghosh, editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and received detailed information on and directions to Puri. At 5.00 p.m. M went to Kashipur and found Girish and two actors in the Master's room. Everyone then went downstairs and M sang two songs in praise of the Divine Mother. M then went back upstairs to Sri Ramakrishna's room and told him about his plan to visit Puri. The Master asked M to consult Balaram also, as he had been to Puri. After that M returned to Calcutta with Surendra.

Friday, 29 January 1886 • The Master had been very ill the night before, but he felt a little better in the morning when M arrived. That morning Shashi told M that the Master was upset because Girish was proclaiming him, among his theatre group, to be an avatara. At noon the Master felt much worse and his throat began to bleed. Shashi cried. When Narendra entered his room, the Master said to him: "This is the condition of your avatara! He is bleeding." Narendra was angry at God the Creator. "I could create a better world than this one," he declared.

Saturday, 30 January 1886 • The Master told Yogin an esoteric truth: "An incarnation of God disappears if people call him an avatara too many times. The king visits the city incognito, but he leaves immediately when people recognize him. If holy people get too many visitors, they leave the place."

Sunday, 31 January 1886 • When M arrived in Kashipur at 4.30 p.m., he was told that the attendants had started restricting visitors. Ramchandra came to see the Master, but even he was turned away.

M stayed that night to help serve the Master. At night the Master asked Narendra to rub his chest with a mixture of ghee and camphor. He had terrible pain in his throat and chest and could not sleep. His attendants felt helpless. He chewed a chunk of myrobalan, which helps moisten the throat.

Monday, 1 February 1886 • Sri Ramakrishna's disease had become aggravated. M arrived in the afternoon. When M entered the room, the Master asked: "How do you see my condition?" M remained silent. He then went downstairs. At Narendra's request M sang five songs.

Tuesday, 2 February 1886 • When M arrived at 5.00 p.m. after work, Narendra told him before he could go upstairs that at 4.00 a.m. the Master had haemorrhaged nearly one seer—two pounds—of blood. When M tried to see the Master, Niranjana forbade him. M was extremely upset. He left the house and sat on a lower branch of the mango tree in the garden. Niranjana came to M and apologized for his rude behaviour. As M was the one coordinating the doctors, he told M that he had gone to consult with Vaidya Mahafej of Bhawanipur, South Calcutta, who practised naturopathy. When Niranjana left, Narendra went to M and said: ‘Do you want to go upstairs? I have not been there for a long while.’ M and Narendra went upstairs and found the Master breathing heavily and with some difficulty. M could not bear the Master’s suffering; he and Narendra went back downstairs. Narendra informed M that the Master asked Kali: ‘Well, is it true what they say [I am an avatara]?’ He indicated that the life of an avatara is beyond human understanding. M spent the night at Kashipur and returned home in the morning.

Wednesday, 3 February 1886 • After work M arrived at Kashipur. Vaidya Mahafej was in the Master’s room. The doctor had brought a medication that the Master was supposed to chew, but he swallowed it instead.

Thursday, 4 February 1886 • At 4.30 p.m. M came to Kashipur, bringing two palm-leaf fans for the Master. The Master told him: ‘The sides of my ears are swollen.’ M remained silent and went downstairs soon after. He heard that Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani had come to see the Master.

In the course of conversation, the pandit told him: ‘Sir, we have read in the scriptures that a great soul like yourself can cure his own physical illness by mere willpower. If you but concentrate your mind on the affected part of the body for a while with the resolve that it be healed, you will be cured. Why don’t you try it, sir?’

The Master replied: ‘As a pandit, how can you make such a suggestion? This mind has been given up to God once and for all. How can I withdraw it

from Him and make it dwell on this cage of flesh and bone?’

Pandit Shashadhar was silenced.¹⁶

Friday, 5 February 1886 • At 4.00 a.m. Nava-gopal came to M’s house and informed him that the Master’s condition was critical. He had had a terrible haemorrhage at 3.00 a.m. Ramchandra and Nava-gopal stayed there that night. Niranjana was supporting the Master when this happened. ‘Mother, I can’t bear anymore,’ Sri Ramakrishna said and fainted in Niranjana’s arms. After a while, all saw the Master’s fresh blood in Narendra’s mouth.¹⁷ M recorded in the diary: ‘Lord’s supper—fresh blood.’

M decided that he and his wife would go to Kashipur to help care for the Master. At 8.30 a.m. he hired a carriage and left for Kashipur with his wife. On the way he wept inconsolably. When he arrived, the Master was sleeping. At 10.30 a.m. the Master got up. He said to M: ‘So much blood! I am so weak that I can’t walk. I have no appetite.’ ‘You will be hungry after a while,’ said M.

Saturday, 6 February 1886 • M went to Kashipur in the early afternoon after work. He relieved the other attendants and stayed alone with the Master, who indicated that he wanted oil to be rubbed on his abdomen. M brought Gopal to do this. The Master coughed again and his throat began to bleed. M poured water on the Master’s head to cool his system, then went downstairs to the garden. As he sat in the garden, he prayed to God that he could continue to serve the Master. M was leaving for Kamarpukur—Sri Ramakrishna’s birthplace—at 5.00 a.m. the next day, so he asked Gopidas for directions.

Thursday, 11 February 1886 • This was a significant day. The Master commissioned Narendra, drawing a picture and writing the following words: ‘Victory to Radha, love personified. Naren will teach loudly inside and outside [India]. Victory to Radha.’ It is assumed that the head of the sketch represents Narendra and the peacock his large following.

M returned to Kashipur at 11.00 p.m. He went directly to the Master’s room and told him in detail

the places he had seen and the people he had met in Kamarpukur. Forgetting his pain, the Master was excited and asked many questions. The Master's face was beaming as he listened to M's account of the visit to his birthplace. M gave the Master the prasad of Raghuvir and a flower he had offered, which the Master joyfully accepted.

M heard from the attendants about the Master's own writing and sketch about Narendra. M copied it in his diary with a comment: 'I take this as something too valuable to be lost.'

Friday, 12 February 1886 • M's wife visited the Master with her brother Dwija. She lamented that she had not been able to accompany M to Kamarpukur, but Holy Mother consoled her, saying: 'You will go with me.' Afterwards M came and met Ramlal downstairs. Both went to the Master's room and found him sleeping. At Baburam's suggestion, M gave a rupee to Ramlal, who wanted to offer tulsi to Krishna in Dakshineswar for the Master's recovery.

Saturday, 13 February 1886 • Keshabchandra Sen's mother, wife, and two sons visited the Master, who greeted them affectionately. M came in the evening and began to fan the Master. He complained of a throbbing pain in his throat and neck. At 7.00 p.m. Girish, Devendra, and other devotees assembled in the hall downstairs, and M joined their discussion. Pointing to M, Devendra remarked: 'I recognized him. He acted in the role of Krishnadas Kaviraj [the recorder] in Chaitanya's divine play.' M left for home at 10.30 p.m.

Sunday, 14 February 1886 • At 11.00 a.m. M went to Dr Sarkar with the Master's health report. He had a long discussion with the doctor about the mystery of the avatara, death, the Master's influence on the theatre, and other topics. In the early afternoon M went to Kashipur. He told the Master that Dr Sarkar would visit him on Wednesday. That night M stayed in Kashipur to serve the Master.

Monday, 15 February 1886 • At 4.30 p.m. M arrived in Kashipur and met Girish and Surendra. The Master was seated in front of the devotees. He gargled gently and a small amount of ghee was ap-

plied to the sore. The Master looked at M intently. Niranjan told M and the others: 'Let us all go downstairs.' M's feelings were hurt. He and Surendra returned to Calcutta, where M visited Ramchandra, who had not been to see the Master for some days. M said to him: 'Please visit the Master. It will be nice if you can see him. His unbearable pain reminds me of the suffering of Christ on the cross.' M then returned home and passed a sleepless night.

Wednesday, 17 February 1886 • At 4.30 p.m. M arrived at Kashipur. He met Narendra in the downstairs hall and asked: 'How is the Master?' Dr Sarkar came to visit Sri Ramakrishna, whose health was deteriorating rapidly.

(To be continued)

Notes and References

15. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 519–20.
16. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 431.
17. It is said that some thought that cancer was a contagious disease, but Narendra wanted to remove that doubt from others' minds by swallowing some of the Master's blood himself.

(Continued from page 682)

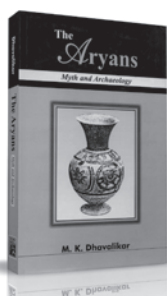
Mysticism is beyond all feelings, emotions, ecstasies. My master said at one time: 'Bliss, yes, but you have to go beyond that also.' Of course, that is indefinable, inexpressible. And coming back after that highest samadhi one may continue to live, but then considers the world a mirage. The appearance is there but the eye has changed: it is the eye of Spirit only. Shankara says: 'With physical eyes what would you see but matter; and with the eye of Spirit, what would you see but Spirit, Brahman?' In other words, you either see everything as matter—when you are in ignorance—or you see nothing but God.

Swami Vivekananda said: 'All is not—God is.' The world disappears completely. Then you realize that Brahman is above, Brahman is below, Brahman is to the right, Brahman is to the left, Brahman is within, and Brahman is without. All is Brahman.



REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



The Aryans: Myth and Archaeology

M K Dhavalikar

Munshiram Manoharlal, Post Box 5715,
54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.
2007. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com.
xii + 226 pp. Rs. 600.

Theories of the Aryans and their origins have been around for a long time, shadowed with debate and controversy. The author suggests in the Preface that the main reason for this has been 'poor archaeological data'. In this work the author claims that 'some clinching evidence' is now at hand. His claim is that the late Harappans can be identified as Aryans or Rig Vedic Aryans. Dhavalikar examines the relevant data—philological, geological, geomorphic, palaeo-environmental, as well as select aspects of the material culture of the late Harappan phase—to push through his hypothesis. Although the early and mature Harappan phases may not have been in any sense Aryan, there are a number of recognizable mediating factors that prove the late Harappan phase was indeed Aryan, or at least leading to the ferment—cultural, material, social, demographic, environmental—that created the Aryans.

However, I disagree with this hypothesis for two reasons. Firstly, the *modus operandi* to locate an Aryan identity from archaeological records is what archaeologists these days call 'identifying ethnicity in archaeology or pre/proto-history'. Despite its popularity, I have not read any convincing literature connected with this theme, unless it is a case of proving something that is entirely obvious. In other words, like the difficulty in trying to prove what the ethnic identity of the Ganges Valley people was during the period of the First Urbanization—other than by calling their dynastic names such as Nandas, Magadhans, Kushan, and Gupta—similarly I think, we cannot label the late Harappans. Moreover, merely through ethnic identity, which is a small local articulation, one cannot label every group's ethnicity inhabiting the Ganges Valley in the first millennium

BCE with names like Nandas and so on; the same can be said for the late Harappans.

Secondly, Dhavalikar has done a commendable job of analysing a plethora of data from a number of viewpoints, but mainly by trying to correlate the Rig Veda with the archaeology of the late Harappan phase. This method, however, has its shortcomings. Identification of Rig Vedic names and places, or those given in the Zend Avesta, with such names can hardly be correlated accurately today with names and places that have dramatically altered. Thus, such an approach, which is reminiscent of the historical geography of Alexander Cunningham—a kind of approach I have always suspected—is no more than informed guesswork and has today as much relevance as Glottochronology.

Therefore, as far as my own reading on this issue takes me, I conclude that there is absolutely no connection between any of the phases of the Harappan culture—which according to Possehl G (2004) terminates around 1900 BCE. The Rig Veda is ascribed to a people who colonized north-western parts of the Indian subcontinent around 1500 BCE. This shows that there is at least a four-hundred-year gap between the material culture of the late Harappan phase and that of the Rig Vedic phase. Just for the record, Dhavalikar has argued that it is during this period—1900 to 1500 BCE—that environmental desiccation created a Harappan diaspora that intermingled and were transformed into the Vedic Aryans. This argument, to me, is a chimerical proposition, as ethnic identities in the far past cannot be so well defined, nor is the evidence presented conclusive enough to prove that there was an Aryan core ethnic identity, commensurate with the Rig Veda, which would have absorbed the late Harappan diaspora. However, the author stands to be complimented for undertaking a gargantuan exercise of correlating Vedic texts with archaeological discoveries, a method that students of Indian archaeology have a lot to learn from.

Ajay Pratap

Associate Professor,
Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Banaras Hindu University



Tattvānusandhānam

Mahadevananda Saraswati;
ed. and trans. Prof. R Sankari

The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute,
Chennai 600 004. 2008. Website: www.ksrisanskrit.in. xxxii + 292 pp. Rs. 300.

T*tattvānusandhānam* aptly justifies its name. The Upanishads recommend enquiry into the nature of the Atman, which is extremely subtle and beyond ordinary human understanding and conditions. The seers of the Upanishads were aphoristic, and this led the later teachers of Vedānta to formulate theories and postulate a number of truths in order to streamline the enquiry and make it result-oriented. The enquiry is extremely subtle, critical, and unflinching in its means. Only those ignorant of Vedānta say disdainfully that this philosophy is not critical and analytical in its approach.

Tattvānusandhānam consists of four chapters. The first one deals with Ishvara and its *upadhi*, limiting adjunct, called *māyā*. Following the *Panchadashi*, the author Mahadevananda Saraswati divides *ajñāna* as *māyā* and *avidyā*. *Ajñāna* has two powers: one of knowledge and the other of action; the latter has the nature of concealment and projection. Advaita declares that from the transcendental standpoint the individual self and supreme Self are one. However, from the phenomenal standpoint this individual self, *jīva*, is interpreted in different ways, of which some well-known ones are referred to by the author. This is followed by a detailed discussion on superimposition, including the process of creation. *Avidyā*, which is the source of bondage, manifests itself as *kāma*, desire; *karma*, action; *asmitā*, ego-sense; *raḡa*, attachment; *dveṣha*, aversion; and *abhiniveṣha*, desire for living. The author successfully classifies *āpavāda*, de-superimposition, as scriptural, logical, and peripheral, citing evidences for such classification. With the help of *adhyarōpa*, superimposition, and *āpavāda* he explains the meaning of the dictum in the Upanishad: *Tat tvam asi*; That thou art.

In the second chapter Mahadevananda clearly describes how a mental state, essential for cognition, takes place. He mentions its varieties and the four types of valid knowledge. Accepting *śabdāparokṣhāvāda*, immediate knowledge through words, Mahadevananda like other Advaitins holds that knowledge of the supreme Reality, called Brahman, can take place through the knowledge of Vedāntic texts. Maha-

devananda refers to the fourfold spiritual practice, preliminary to knowledge, and incidentally mentions different types of *sannyāsa* as well as four varieties of *dispassion*. While treating intrinsic *sādhana*s, such as *śhrāvana* and the like, Mahadevananda briefly discusses why the suffix *tavya* in the term *śhrotavya* is to be taken as injunctive. While dealing with *anupālabdhi*, the last variety of *pramāṇa*, valid knowledge, Mahadevananda dismisses the four types of *abhava*, negation, from the Vedāntic viewpoint.

The third chapter deals with *āpramā*, false knowledge, along with its division and sub-divisions. The author rightly points out that dreams too are erroneous cognition. While admitting two types of obstacles—*asambhavana*, sense of impossibility, and *viparītabhavana*, erroneous cognition—Mahadevananda introduces three more types of obstacles pointing to *bhūta*, past, *bhavi*, future, and *vartamāna*, present. He gives a detailed treatment of them by citing different scriptural evidences in their favour. The chapter concludes saying that the *sādhaka* with intense longing for emancipation realizes his oneness with Brahman when the mind is completely purged of impurities and is convinced of the import of the Vedāntic dictum. However, he lays emphasis on *dhyāna*.

The last chapter classifies *mukti*, emancipation. After a brief description of *videhamukti*, liberation after death, Mahadevananda deals with *jīvanmukti*, liberation in life, and makes copious references to it from different scriptures. The author then describes higher *sādhana*s effective for remaining in the state of *jīvanmukti*. He mentions many aids a *sādhaka* may try and freely refers to different yoga practices to attain the goal of life.

Tattvānusandhānam, with its four chapters, clearly shows its allegiance to the *Vedānta Sūtra* framed by Bādarāyana. Many other Vedānta works also have four chapters. Achārya Śhankara concludes his famous *Adhyāsa Bhaṣya* with these words: 'In order to eradicate this source of evil—superimposition of not-self on the Self—and to know the oneness of the Self all Vedāntic studies begin.' This, briefly, is the aim of studying Vedānta set by Achārya Śhankara. With this in mind Mahadevananda Saraswati explains, at the outset, the import of the famous dictum *tat tvam asi*. This *mahāvākya*, great saying, has a wealth of meaning and refers to everything: the universe in all its stages, its substratum Ishvara, pure Consciousness, dependent existence of the universe and hence its falsity, the *jīva* with its different states and psycho-physical coverings, its nature as witness and pure Self,

and the jiva's identity with the supreme Self. As the true teacher he was, Mahadevananda takes pains to explain why such statements are said to convey an undivided meaning, *akhandartha*.

Advaitins put their best efforts in proving the oneness of the jiva and supreme Self, which alone is the Reality. But until and unless falsity of the universe is proved, the one Reality cannot be reached. The author quotes a number of scriptural texts to prove the falsity of the universe. He rightly holds on to the Advaitic standpoint that the diversity, which is insentient, cannot have any independent existence. Further, the sentient principle called Brahman and the insentient universe cannot be identical. Thus, the author successfully removes the commonly held misunderstanding regarding the meaning of Upanishadic statement such as *sarvam khalvidam brahma* and *brahmaivedam sarvam*. Nonetheless, at least a brief treatment of falsity with reference to its definition available in higher Vedanta works could have added clarity to the point.

As far as philosophical standpoints are concerned, Yoga and Advaita Vedanta hold different views, for instance, with regard to the manifold jivas and the process of creation. In spite of that, Advaitins are not prejudiced in accepting the sadhanas recommended in Yoga philosophy. Such catholicity is conspicuous in the teachings of Acharya Shankara, as found in the 'Yoga Pratyukta Adhikarana' in the *Brahmasutra*.

Mahadevananda Saraswati, a true Advaitin, accepts the views on *avidya* expounded by different teachers. This is evident from the definition of *ajnana* furnished by him. *Avidya* is that which is opposite to knowledge and which inhibits the rise of knowledge of the Atman. As a sadhaka, Mahadevananda Saraswati knows clearly what obstacles bar the rise of knowledge. He, therefore, has unhesitatingly quoted Patanjali's aphorism defining *avidya*. Mahadevananda Saraswati does not trouble himself to elucidate the positivity of *avidya*, its inexplicable nature, and so on. He simply says that in order to have Self-knowledge we must overcome false notions of the transitory as eternal, the impure as pure, pain as happiness, and non-self for the Atman. Sri Ramakrishna too accepts the path of knowledge as propounded by Acharya Shankara and had the supra-sensuous experience by following that path. He further teaches that lust and greed are *maya*, which obscures our perception and obstructs spiritual Self-knowledge. Mahadevananda Saraswati admits *vairagya*, dispassion, with its varieties as taught by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutra*. Mahadevananda's

Tattvanusandhanam lays great emphasis on sadhana. A knower of Truth himself, he knew the difficulty in experiencing non-duality and seeing the world as a 'flower in the sky'. This work is therefore highly recommended for seekers with an analytical bent of mind.

A few inconsistencies are also observed in the book. According to the author, perception of happiness is *aprama*, erroneous. It is true that every object in the world is false and their cognition too must be equally false. In the perception of happiness no mental state is required, because happiness and the like are not unknown entities; but a mental state is required for the perception of phenomenal objects, as they are unknown entities. One cannot conclude, from the above statement, that perceptual knowledge of happiness is *aprama*. In Vedanta happiness, joy, sorrow, and other emotions are directly revealed to the *sakshi*, witness-self. The author admits that the world is sublated during transmigratory existence (85); therefore, concluding that the mind and its attributes are apparently real as in nacre-silver (93) is inconsistent.

In the third chapter the author classifies *smriti*, memory, under *aprama*, false knowledge, (163). However, in defining *prama*, valid knowledge, which has the individual self as the locus, he says it is consciousness reflected in the mental mode in the form of the objects that were hitherto unknown and are later not sublated (86). When memory is excluded from the purview of *prama*, then defining it is uncalled for. Such qualifying word, as *anadhigata*, is inconsequential. In the beginning of the third chapter the author classifies *aprama* as *smriti* and *anubhuti*, experience. And while subdividing *anubhuti* he says that valid experience is *prama*. It is true that a valid experience is *prama*; therefore, putting it under *aprama* is contradictory.

Nirguna upasana, meditation on the unqualified Brahman, is a highly controversial issue. The *Panchadashi* propounds such a view and adduces some reasons in its support. However, a large number of Advaitins do not have allegiance to it, as this *upasana* is beset with many logical flaws. After repeatedly stating *abhava*, non-existence, as non-eternal (159–61), Mahadevananda Saraswati says that absolute *abhava* of the world in Brahman is eternal. This is inconsistent and goes against Advaita philosophy.

Barring some inconsistencies of sandhis as well as not putting any combining mark, the book is a welcome addition to Advaitic literature.

Swami Tattwavidananda

Principal, Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math

REPORTS

Recognition

On 31 October 2010 the Indian National Congress conferred the 'Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration' for the year 2009 on **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**. Smt Sonia Gandhi, President, Indian National Congress, handed over the award comprising a citation and a sum of 2.5 lakh rupees in a function held at Teen Murti House auditorium, New Delhi, in the presence of Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India, and several other dignitaries.

Durga Puja

Centres in India and abroad celebrated Durga Puja (in image) from 14 to 17 October. In India: Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar (under Agartala), Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella (under Cherrapunji), Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama. Abroad: Durban, South Africa; Geneva, Switzerland; Mauritius; Toronto, Canada; and Baliati, Barisal, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Habiganj, Narayanganj, and Sylhet in Bangladesh. At **Dhaka** Ms Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh, Mr Hossain Mohammad Ershad, former president of Bangladesh, and several other distinguished persons attended the Durga Puja.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh,



conducted eye check-up for 2,410 school children of Panchkula district, Haryana, and Patiala district, Punjab, and provided free glasses to 97 of those children with eye refractory errors.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, distributed vitamin A capsules to 362 underprivileged school children and free glasses to 81 children with eye refractory errors in September.

Ramakrishna Math, Mangalore, conducted seminars for youths from 27 to 29 September. More than 600 youths participated on each day. The seminars were organized for BEd students on the first day, students of postgraduate studies in social work and management on the second day, and for engineering students on the third day.

On 1 October a cardiology clinic was inaugurated in the hospital at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram.**

Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar, organized

a workshop on health awareness that was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, chief minister of Tripura, on 1 October, National Blood Donation Day. The following day the centre held a blood donation camp that drew 47 donors.

Mr M O H Farook, governor of Jharkhand, inaugurated a 20-bed primary health care unit at **Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi**, on 9 October.

The newly built monks' quarters and staff quarters at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, were inaugurated on 9 October.

A DVD containing the archives of 96 years of the *Vedanta Kesari* was released at **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, on 9 October.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released a DVD containing the archives of 60 years of the *Bulletin* of the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, on 11 October.

Achievements

Three students—Bodhisattwa Basu, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and Sugata Mandal—associated with the department of mathematics of the **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, gained admission to doctoral programmes in various universities in France. Besides, two faculty members, two research scholars, and three MSc students of the university attended, on invitation, the prestigious International Congress of Mathematicians, held for the first time in India, at Hyderabad from 19 to 27 August.

Swaraj Sansthan Sanchalanalaya, Ministry of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, conferred the 'Maharaja Agrasen Rashtriya Samman' on the **Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math**, in recognition of its outstanding service activities and its efforts to achieve fraternity and equality in society. Sri Laxmikanta Sharma, Minister of Culture, Madhya Pradesh, handed over the award comprising a citation and a sum of 2 lakh rupees on 8 October at Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal. Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission,




Handing over of the 'Maharaja Agrasen Rashtriya Samman'

received the award on behalf of the Mission.

Relief

Flood Relief • During the month of October centres in North India continued relief operations among flood victims. Details of the operations are as follows. **Chandigarh** treated 300 flood-affected patients in Panipat district. **Kanpur** distributed 803 saris, 800 lungis, 800 blankets, 800 mats, 4 plastic buckets, 4 sets of steel utensils (each set containing 2 plates, 2 glasses, and 3 cooking vessels), 2,020 kg rice, 8 kg dal, 8 kg sugar, and other items to the victims of Ganga Katari area in Kanpur district. **Vrindaban** distributed 1,000 kg rice, 200 kg dal, 200,000 halo-gen tablets, 500 kg bleaching powder, 478 saris, and 400 blankets to 200 flood-affected families of Vrindaban Khadar area in Mathura district. **Almora** distributed 5,000 blankets to 1,674 families in Almora district. **Kankhal** provided medical relief to 1,200 flood-affected patients of 9 nearby villages.

Aila Cyclone Relief • **Belgharia** distributed, as part of its post-Aila-Cyclone-relief activities, 1,450 saris, 1,370 lungis, 1,948 mosquito nets, 900 solar lanterns, and 1,948 blankets to 974 Aila-affected families of Hingalganj block in North 24-Parganas district during October.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to the needy: **Agartala**: 435 saris, 113 dhotis, and 470 children's garments; **Garbeta**: 110 kg rice, 45 kg flour, 174 saris, 10 dhotis, 27 lungis, 25 vests, 337 children's garments, and 24 assorted garments; **Jalpaiguri**: 500 saris; **Karimganj**: 355 saris and 65 dhotis; **Taki**: 100 saris and 50 dhotis. 



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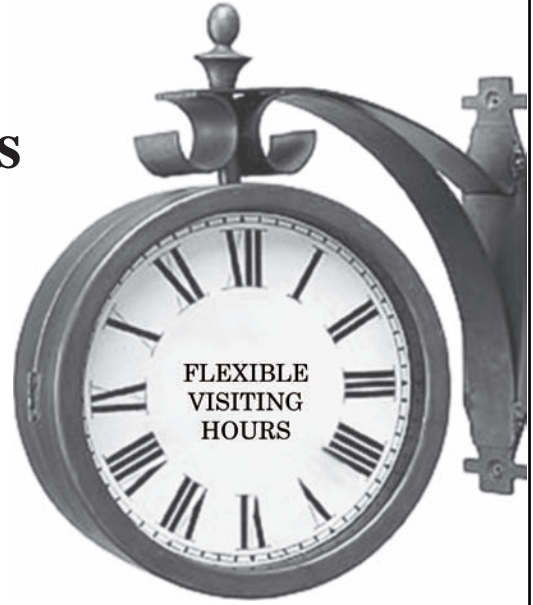
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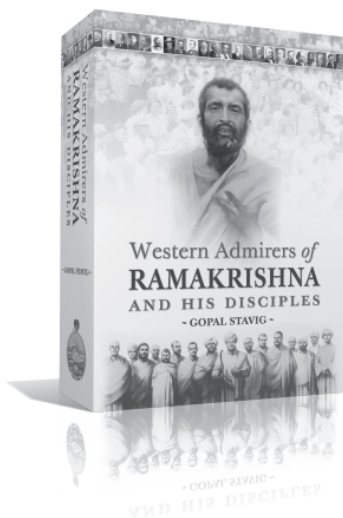
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